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Evolution of Domestic Workers’ Spaces within Kuwaiti Houses, 1964-2014

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Gender and Space
Evolution of Domestic Workers' Spaces within Kuwaiti Houses, 1964–2014

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Abstract

For the past half-century, Kuwait has employed the second largest number of migrated Asian and African domestic workers in Middle-East.¹ The latest statistics state that there are more than 660,000 domestic workers in Kuwait, representing a ratio of one worker for every two Kuwaiti residents.² The exponential increase in employing migrated domestic workers in Kuwait accompanied the huge increase in oil revenues in the 1970s. The increase number of Kuwaiti women joining the labor force is another factor causing the phenomenon.

The presence of domestic workers in nearly every house has became essential to Kuwaiti families. Foreign domestic labors live in close proximity to Kuwaiti families, sharing their private spaces and raise and educate their children. Further, the relationship between employer and worker ranges from being embraced as a member of the family to being considered a “domestic enemy”. Ever since the beginning of domestic labors emergence in Kuwait in 1960s, Kuwaiti houses included a special space for their domestic workers. The relationship between employers and employees is inscribed in their spaces within the house they share. Through time, these spatial relations between Kuwaiti family’s spaces and domestic workers’ spaces have changed continuously with the change of many factors.

¹ Human Right Watch. Walls at Every Turn: Abuse of Migrant Domestic Workers through Kuwait’s Sponsorship System. (2010). P.21.
² Ibid, P:22
Despite the long history of domestic workers living with Kuwaiti families, studies of this marginalized group are limited and mostly concern the humanitarian aspect of the subject, while spatial studies of their existence in Kuwaiti houses are lacking. Against this background, this thesis document the spatial aspect of domestic workers’ existence in Kuwaiti houses. Such a study must capture the two sides of the coin, namely the worker’s and the employer’s sides, as well as the relationship between the two groups within the household. In particular, this thesis focuses on the evolution of domestic worker spaces within Kuwaiti houses from 1964 until 2014. It will reveal, major differences between male and female domestic workers’ spaces in Kuwaiti houses, by using theories of gendered space to understand the social, cultural, and lived experiences of both men and women in domestic service.
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Chapter 1:

1.1. Introduction

For more than half a century, Kuwaitis have employed migrant live-in domestic workers in their homes. With the economic growth in Kuwait since the 1950s, many married middle-class Kuwaiti women started to join the workforce. As a result, demand for employing migrant domestic workers increased dramatically. A consequence of that phenomenon is the existence of live-in domestic labors in almost every middle-income Kuwaiti house.

Domestic workers live with their employers and shared their everyday lives, including the intimate domestic space. Despite living together physically under one roof, in reality they had many borders and boundaries between them. The divergence of class, race, culture and language between employer and workers helped create social boundaries that divided the spheres of the house between the “us” and the “others.” Over time, domestic workers’ spaces within Kuwaiti houses have been changing gradually, due to many factors that helped shaping and re-shaping Employer-worker relationship. This study will investigate the configuration of these spaces, describe their evolution over time and explore the reflection of the employer–worker relationship on such spaces and vice versa. This thesis therefore uses the lens of gender to investigate the different jobs given to male or female domestic labors and how that was reflected in their spaces within the family house.

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While many local and international studies have examined migrated domestic labors in Kuwait, spatial studies are lacking. Under Kuwaiti law, employers must provide adequate housing for their domestic workers. The law does not specify the characteristics of “adequate housing,” leaving the matter to the employer’s discretion. This thesis aims to shed light on domestic workers’ spatial conditions, providing a base for municipality policymakers in the country to include the specifications of domestic workers’ spaces in their building codes. By reviewing a set of evolving physical and social barriers that affected the domestic workers’ space over time, I hope this study helps architects in Kuwait realizing that the servants’ room they design is, more or less, the “home” of a migrated domestic worker living within a family. It is a private space that he or she can enjoy during their off-duty time, considering that the family spaces of the house are their working space.

1.2. Statement of the problem

In Kuwaiti houses, the separation between servants and the served was defined spatially and socially. The separation between the family space and workers’ spaces, which generated a sense of “otherness” in Kuwaiti dwellings, can be seen from contradictory viewpoints. One could see this “otherness” of domestic workers’ spaces positively in terms of providing them with independence and freedom, a basic right granted to an adult who deserves to enjoy life and preserve his/her distinctive personae. Workers’ individuality is thus maintained spatially as with any other family member. The other perspective suggests that “otherness” results from the negative

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relationship between both family members and their workers. This contested relationship, which is driven mainly by fear and doubt, uses spatial detachment as a defensive barrier that preserves different cultures, traditions, and beliefs from interaction and, eventually, disruption.

The main question that this thesis attempts to answer is whether the spatial segregation in Kuwaiti houses is simply a physical manifestation of the long social tension between two realms. Does the tension remain despite the absence of segregation? Or is architectural culture the main driver that leads to social struggles and, by developing it, could social change be expected? To answer these questions, we particularly examine the historical evolution of Kuwaiti houses, affected by the social, political, and economic development of Kuwaiti society, and its relationship with the development of domestic workers’ spaces.

1- How did the cultural, social, linguistic, and religious backgrounds of domestic workers affect their relationships with their employers, how did they affect the production of their spaces?

2- What role did gender play in shaping and re-shaping domestic workers’ spaces?

3- How did the changes that accompanied Kuwaiti women’s role in society affect the evolution of domestic workers’ spaces?

1.3. Methodology

This thesis adopts the mixed method of using a qualitative and a quantitative approach, extracting its data from two main sources. The first is reading and analyzing both secondary
sources such as books, articles and newspapers, and primary sources such as architectural drawings of Kuwaiti houses, Kuwaiti domestic labor policies from different time periods, statistics about domestic servants, and reports. The sources of this data included government archives and architectural offices in Kuwait.

The state-built house prototypes used in this study are part of the National Housing Authority’s yearbooks. These yearbooks were collected through many archival visits to the Kuwait Municipality archive, Ministry of Housing archive and Center of Studies and Research on Kuwait archive. The governmental studies of domestic workers in Kuwait were found in the National Library of Kuwait.

The house plans are analyzed by using the “justified access map” method to examine how a certain space is related to or segregated from different rooms in the house. This graphical analysis approach was developed by Hillier and Hanson in their book, The Social Logic of Space. The application of this analysis helps show how the spatial organization of a house permits or restricts movement from one space to another by measuring the permeability of specific spaces within the broader organization of the house. Under this mapping system, a certain point of departure (i.e., the servants’ room in this thesis) should be chosen. The house spaces and rooms are then given a form of circle and the outer world is referred to as a circle with X. Next, from the worker’s room circle, a direct line is drawn to represent the direct access to other circles that represent specific spaces in the house.

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Another method used in this thesis is to measure the architectural features designed to safeguard the privacy of the employers’ spaces. These features include the distance traveled between one room and another, the number of doors passed through, the number of stairs climbed or having to go outside to enter a specific space. Distance can thus indicate the social distance between the barriers to different rooms in the house, which makes measuring the linear distance from the servants’ room to other spaces in the house meaningful. In this sense, the relation of the servants’ room to the other spaces of the house is investigated.

1.4. Terminology

Many terms are used in Kuwait to describe migrant domestic servants. The predominant term used by the labor department of the Kuwait Interior Ministry is *alamalah almanzeleyah* (العمالة المنزلية, domestic labor). By contrast, in the three governmental studies of domestic workers in Kuwait carried out in the 1980s, the term *khadam* (servant خادم) dominated. The National Housing Authority (NHA) in Kuwait has used different terms over time. In its first housing plan, it used the term *khadim* (servant خادم), while in the second housing plan, the term *murabeyah* (nanny مربية) was used. In recent housing plans, it has again used *khadim* (servant خادم).

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The International Labour Organization (ILO) defines “any person engaged in domestic work within an employment relationship” as a domestic worker.\(^6\) This choice of term reflects the ILO’s efforts to include domestic workers within general labor standards, from which they are mostly excluded.\(^7\) In the same manner, Human Rights Watch uses the term “domestic worker.” As this thesis aims to contribute to raising the general awareness of the importance of including domestic workers in Kuwait under the protection of the general labor law, the term “domestic worker” is used throughout this study.

1.5. Literature Review

Many scholars and organizations have written about domestic workers in Kuwait. The majority of nonprofit organizations have tackled the matter from a humanitarian point of view, urging the end of the kafalah system (sponsorship system) in Kuwait and calling for equality for domestic workers. Human Rights Watch prepared a study called “Walls at Every Turn: Abuse of Migrant Domestic Workers through Kuwait’s Sponsorship System” in 2010. The study highlighted the main difficulties foreign domestic workers face in Kuwait. It tackled the unequal rights between general workers under the Kuwaiti main worker law and domestic workers under the domestic worker law. The latter lacked legal protection that controls any other workplace. A similar study was carried out in 2013 by the International Human Rights Clinic, titled “The

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Protection of the Rights of Migrant Domestic Workers in a Country of Origin and a Country of Destination: Case Studies of the Philippines and Kuwait.” This report investigates the gaps in the legal protection of domestic workers in Kuwait and provides recommendations to governments of domestic workers and destinations, recruitment agencies and organizations to work on enhancing such legal protection.

In the 1970s and 1980s, large numbers of Asian workers migrated to the Gulf to seek jobs. This phenomenon was a major concern to Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to the extent that in 1983\(^8\) they called for regional research investigating the rising numbers of domestic workers and the implication on the upbringing of children in the country of study. Three studies were conducted in Kuwait: the first by the Ministry and Social Affairs and Labor in 1983, the second by the Ministry of Planning in 1983 and the third by the Ministry of Education in 1985. The three studies resulted in forming a committee from the three different ministries to produce a concluding document. The committee report included the important findings and recommendations of each study. The findings mainly examined the negative influence of domestic workers on Kuwaiti culture and family life.

1.6. Historical Background

1.6.1. Domestic service in Kuwait: pre-oil till now

Pre-oil Domestic Work

In pre-oil Kuwait, domestic work was carried by the wife or by the slaves in the case of wealthy families. According to historian J. G. Lorimer, in 1904 Kuwait had a population of 35,000, of which 4,000 were assimilated slaves and ex-slaves of African origin. Some slaves were trained to be pearl divers, while others became domestic slaves, working in merchants’ houses to perform domestic duties such as cleaning and childcare.

Slavery was common in Kuwait before its abolition in 1953 by the Sheikh, who agreed to become a signatory to the Supplementary Slavery Convention. However, by 1961, “all the trucial rulers had some old slaves in their household but they remained by choice.” Ahmed Abdullah, a Kuwaiti citizen, confirms this information: “Bukhita was an African freed slave for our neighbor Om Fahad A., she remained living with them until her death in 2009. She suffered from Alzheimer and was always recalling old days and calling her old owners.”

Slavery is not an extension of domestic servant history for many reasons. First, domestic service is a waged profession governed by a contract, whereas slavery was unwaged labor. Second,

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11 Arabian Gulf rulers.
slavery in Kuwait was managed by many Islamic rules that can embrace them and their children as a part of the family and can free them from slavery. Different rules and regulations set by Islamic laws that make slavery significantly different to domestic service. Domestic slaves were non-family members who lived with the Kuwaiti family to perform domestic chores before the emergence of migrant domestic workers in Kuwait. They set the stage of the “other” spaces of non-family members carrying out domestic chores in the pre-oil period in Kuwait.

Many verses in the Quranic text address slavery as an existing part of society, encouraging the freeing of slaves and considering this action as a good deed that makes up for wrongdoing. Freamon Bernard, explains:

[L]ike the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament, the previously revealed texts of the Abrahamic faiths, the Qur’an accepted the institution of slavery as an established part of the lives of believers. At the outset, it thus sought to humanize and regulate the practice of slavery rather than seek its outright and immediate abolition.14

Female slaves were considered to be the personal property of the master and they may have served as a concubine.15 If so, her children from the master were given the same rights and enjoyed a similar social status as his other children from his wife.

Slaves were embraced by the family and taken care of. For example, in the case of marriage, the master would finance a slave wedding as if the participants were his own children.16


16 Ibid, pp. 12
However, abolishing slavery in Kuwait was applied affectively by 1961 as mentioned earlier, and this was one of the many reasons that prompted the need to employ migrated domestic workers in Kuwait. According to a Kuwaiti governmental study, the increased number of migrated domestic workers in Kuwait is caused by such factors as:

- The increase in oil revenues reflected in higher income per capita.
- The increasing responsibilities on nuclear families, which led them to hiring domestic servants to help with housework. The housing program of the Kuwaiti government in the 1950s, which encouraged an independent house for every Kuwaiti nuclear family, led to a sudden breakage of the extended family house of the pre-oil time of Kuwait.
- The increasing number of married Kuwaiti women joining the workforce, which created a gap in the housework load and childcare in their families.

**The beginning of migrant domestic workers**

The first official statistics in Kuwait showing the number of migrated domestic workers arrived in 1975. However, between the 1960s and 1974, many Arab women who migrated with their families to Kuwait worked as domestic labours in Kuwaiti houses. These were undetectable to many scholars because they arrived in the country under visiting or working visas. The first domestic labour rules were generated by the Kuwaiti government in 1974, which specified a new

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18 Nuclear family (husband, wife and unmarried kids).
type of visa for domestic labours (Visa 20). Between the 1960s and late 1970s, the majority of workers were Arab couples or young single female and male Arabs.\(^{19}\)

Since this study focuses on domestic spaces in Kuwaiti houses. It is important to understand the dramatic changes that affected both Kuwaiti people and their houses before the beginning of the study period.

1.6.2. **Evolution of house type in Kuwait from pre-oil till 2014**

**Pre-oil Kuwait**

In the pre-oil era, Kuwait City was built around the port, where boats departed to carry out pearl diving and begin their trading journeys with India. The port was thus the focal point of the whole city; it was the economic motor that drove the city and it created the main source of wealth for most of the city’s inhabitants in the pre-oil discovery period. Pearl diving, sailing, and boatbuilding were performed exclusively by men, with women excluded from the whole process. As Kuwaiti men were responsible for bringing money into their homes, women were expected to do the daily tasks of running the house and childrearing; they were used to hard work. Some boat journeys at this time lasted for four to six months every year. The port resembled men’s control and power over women, resulting in the city forming two spheres: the outside sphere for men and the indoor sphere for women. The men’s sphere extended from the sea and port to the cafes, street

benches, and indoor diwanyah. The diwanyah is a room or salon in Kuwaiti houses used by men only as a social hub. Men gathered weekly or daily to discuss political, social, and economic issues. The servicing of this room had to be done by a male servant only.

Fig. 1: Overview photo of pre-1950s Kuwait old city.
On the contrary, women were not encouraged to go outside the house except in emergencies; in particular, upper-class women had one or more female slaves to look after their needs (e.g. go to the market and run errands). Domestic help during this period was either African slaves in rich families or daily help from poor non-Kuwaiti residents, who assisted with housework and were rewarded in the form of food or money. As female slaves had to go outside the house to run errands, their sphere was broader than that of their mistress. Most of the cultural barriers constraining Kuwaiti women did not impact on the slaves. For example, they were not allowed to cover up or dress like free women. It was thus more accepted that they would mingle in markets to meet their mistress’s needs.

Fig. 2: Aerial view of pre-1950s Kuwait old city, showing the dominant house type of courtyard houses.
Kuwaiti people used to live in the old city with a wall surrounding it. The houses used to be mostly one story courtyard houses with high walls and few windows to the outside (Figure 1).

The neighborhoods were named after families, where different families used to reside next to each other, building their houses on their relative’s walls.

Haya Al-Mughny, described the old Kuwaiti neighborhoods: “families lived close to each other, each in a distinct farij (neighborhood فريج). The town was divided into hayy Sharq (People of the East حي شرق), Hayy Qibla or Jibli (the west حي قبله) and the Wasat (center وسط). The eastern part of the town was the domain of pearl merchants, nukhodas and divers, while the western part was dominated by the wholesale merchants.

Fig. 3: Floor Plan of the old Al-Bader house, showing the gendered spaces of the old Kuwaiti house.
Houses used to grow with the family; a room or extension would be built with the marriage of each male member. The streets narrowed with every turn before reaching a dead-end, easily identifying and suspecting any stranger mingling in the neighborhood. Further, houses have one or more courtyard depending on the family’s wealth. Courtyard houses were organized by two main factors: function and gender.

**Oil Boom and Urban Development**

In the 1950s, Kuwait witnessed radical and rapid development caused by internal and external factors. The economic shift from pearl diving and port trading to a wealthy oil economy was the starting point. This new wealth made Kuwait more desirable to aggressors, and new external and internal attempts were made by regional avarice to threaten the security of Kuwait. Shaikh Abdullah Al-Salem, the ruler of Kuwait in that period, felt the urge to set the borders and put Kuwait on the global map.

This led to the launch of a new development program (DP) whose main purpose was to modernize the country and reform Kuwait economically, politically, culturally, and socially. The DP clarified the power of ruling elites to lead the country and enforce control and power over the land. It also enclosed Shaikh Abdulla Al-Salem’s desire to share the oil wealth and political powers with the people. The DP fostered many new projects that produced new employment opportunities, educational improvements, and institutional developments.

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Housing in Kuwait

The DP also included a new urban plan for the country and proposals for architecture that reflected the new image of the city. The first urban plan, by Minoprio-Spencely and McFarlane
(MSM), was submitted to Shaikh Abdullah Al-Salem in 1952. In the proposal, the old city was to be wiped out and a new downtown would be built instead. Kuwaiti people were to be relocated from the old city to eight new suburban areas that surrounded the new downtown district.

In the 1960s, the new urban plans were executed. Under the land acquisition program that started in 1951, old Kuwaiti houses were demolished and people were relocated to the new suburban areas (Fig 3.) The constitution of Kuwait was written and agreed on at the same time.

Fig. 5: The Development plan showing the old city surrounded by the new suburbs.

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22 Under the scheme, the state purchased “land from citizens at prices higher than the market value, and (re-sold) it at nominal prices to encourage houses construction on allotted plots”. See: Al-Dekhayel, Abdulkarim. Kuwait: Oil, State and Political Legitimation. (UK: Ithaca Press, 2000), pp. 136.
One of the important Kuwaiti rights in the constitution is the right to housing. Later came the second urban plan in 1970–1971 and the third in 1997, both presented by Buchanan. These urban plans suggested the design of new suburban areas and distribution to Kuwaitis of ready-built dwellings or plot areas for housing purposes. Thus, several housing programs and schemes were drawn, including:

- The distribution of public housing such as houses and apartments for very low-, limited- and middle-income groups. This housing scheme can be called state-built homes (SBHs).
- The provision of plots and financial facilities for house-building, targeting the limited and middle-income groups. For this housing stream, the Saving and Credit Bank was founded in 1960 (which used to be the Trust Bank in 1960–1965) by the government. The bank offers interest-free loans and Kuwait municipalities provide a plot area at a nominal price. After the completion of payments, the title of the house is transferred to citizens. This housing stream is called the “Plot and Loan” option.

To raise housing welfare, the government formed councils, rolled out many departments and several ministries and founded the Saving and Credit Bank of Kuwait (in 1960). All efforts were made to ensure a fair and continuous distribution of adequate housing. The housing mission started in 1954, when the Council of Construction was established to officially execute the first public housing program. This plan enfolded the execution of 2,000 house units in the new suburban

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23 Colin Buchanan, is one of the British planners invited by Kuwait to work on the master plan. He produced the second master plan for Kuwait in 1971. See: Shiber, Saba. *Recent Arab City Growth.* (Kuwait: Government Printing Press, 1969), pp. 720
areas. These units were allocated to the limited-income group. The government housing units followed the principle of “neighborhood units” and had the following features:

- A limited population.
- All supporting facilities such as government schools and kindergartens, shopping facilities, a clinic and a place of worship.
- Surrounded by an area of land to protect it from road pollution.
- A park or facilities for sports and recreation.\textsuperscript{25}

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{fig6.jpg}
\caption{One of the state ready-built housings in new area. 1970s.}
\end{figure}

In 1974, the government established a semi-autonomous body called the National Housing Welfare (NHA) that soon was rolled out under a newly formed housing ministry. The NHA developed three five-year housing plans. In the first housing plan (1976–1981), it executed 17,000 dwelling units mainly for the very low- and limited-income groups. The second plan (1981–1986) completed 15,000 house units, 1,000 apartments and 608 plots for house-building. The majority of these dwelling units went to the middle-income group. The third housing plan was between 1985 and 1989, and the NHA succeeded in providing 7,451 dwelling units and 4,421 plot areas for houses.  

Limited-income house units were built on plots of 300 square meters (3,228 square feet). Generally, each dwelling unit was two floors, with four bedrooms, one guestroom, one dining room, one living room, a kitchen and three bathrooms. Limited-income dwellings had no special room allocated for domestic servants. By contrast, in middle-income dwelling units, domestic workers’ spaces were an essential element of the unit design. This fact makes such middle-income dwellings the primary concern of this study.

**Housing scheme for the middle-income group:**

The first housing scheme for the middle-income group, which started in 1969, took the form of the “Plot and Land” option. The plots were 750 square meters (8,070 square feet), while loans were given by the Credit and Saving Bank. These loans were interest-free and had long-term repayment agreements (up to 30 years). In 1977, the NHA started ready-built house units for the middle-class group. The house designs were 500–600 square meters (5,380–6,456 square feet) and

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consisted of four bedrooms, a guestroom, a kitchen, a dining room, a laundry room and a domestic servants’ room. In 1980, housing welfare started new apartments. Under this housing option, apartments consisted of a domestic servants’ room and bathroom; however, by 1983, the government declared that this housing type was not preferred by Kuwaitis. It took another 30 years for the government to consider apartments to be a housing solution for Kuwaitis. For this reason, this study will exclude this housing type from its scope.

Every Kuwaiti citizen should have benefited from these new housing solutions. The aim was to ensure that every nuclear family who did not own a property received adequate housing. The new suburbs followed the principle of “neighborhood units”.27

The new NHA has drawn three major housing plans, each of five years: the first housing plan (1976–1981), the second housing plan (1981–1986) and the third housing plan (1986–1990). In this thesis, two streams of government solutions will be considered: the plot and loan option and state-built housing.

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27 Neighborhood units should have “a limited population, supporting facilities built by the states and public parks.”
**Kuwaiti Women: The Homemakers**

In the pre-oil time, Kuwaiti women’s participation in the public sphere was restricted. Women would spend their days in the haram part of the house looking after their children and doing housework; they were financially dependent on their spouse and male relatives. Indeed, education for Kuwaiti women only started in 1916, and then only for Quranic studies and embroidery.28

Subsequently, many private schools opened and many young women joined the system. The educational advantages were such that in 1956 a group of Kuwaiti women burned their Abbaya29 in a public space to demand the right to study abroad. The Abbaya resembles the cultural constraint on women that played a large role in her confinement and prisoning. Their choice to wear the Abbaya – which is a cultural production – rather than the Hijab – which is an Islamic practice – shows that culture was blamed for constraining women’s lives. Kuwaiti women tried hard to move away from the domestic role drawn for them.

In 1965, with the founding of Kuwait University, the door to pursue a bachelor’s degree opened for both men and women. Women found a way to continue their higher education that did not involve them travelling abroad, which was not encouraged by the majority of Kuwaiti families, unlike the case for their male partners or brothers.

Since the 1950s, the lives of Kuwaiti women have changed rapidly and the gender gap has declined. Women’s political rights, access to education, and job opportunities have expanded.

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29 Abbaya: A traditional garment that is loose and long, covering the whole body except for the face, hands, and feet. Usually in black.
significantly. As many educated women groups continue to surface in the community, the contribution of women to the socio-political sphere rises. Haya Al-Mughny, a scholar, stated:

the entry of women into the wage-earning sector has been one of the state’s main policies. Since the production of oil and the massive influx of foreign labour, the government has acknowledge the importance of Kuwaiti women in the labour force. The first five year plan, for the period (1967/1968-1971/1972), stated that ‘population policy should take into account the need to increase the contribution of Kuwaitis to the total labour force and that this cannot be achieved unless Kuwaiti women are encouraged to enlist in suitable activities’

Indeed, the number of Kuwaiti women joining the workforce has increased rapidly. For example, in the teaching profession, they share jobs with other migrated Arab women from Syria and Palestine. The influence of those strong migrated Arab women on their Kuwaiti colleagues can also be considered to be a factor behind the change in the perception of Kuwaiti women’s role in the community. However, while Kuwaiti women’s contribution to the labor force has reached the highest percentage in the GCC, the childcare system and the distribution of housework in the domestic space between men and women has not changed.

Large middle-class group has started to surface in Kuwait. Middle-class families with higher income and have the financial capability to hire migrated domestic servants to do the housework and childcare. There is a similar rising pace between the number of Kuwaiti women joining the labor force and the number of domestic servants migrating to Kuwait. From the 1950s until now, the race, demographic profile, and religion of domestic servants have changed with the change in many factors. The relationship between the served and the servant has changed over time, and the

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domestic space and relationship between each group space have been the witness of their everyday interactions.

It is important to review the evolution of Kuwaiti houses from 1950 to 2000. To understand the changes in domestic servants’ spaces, one should examine their context (i.e. the Kuwaiti house in each study period) to understand the details that helped social change.
Chapter 2: Domestic worker' Spaces

In this section, the evolution of domestic workers’ spaces from 1964 until 2014 will be studied and documented in order to trace and understand its relationship with the broader organization of Kuwaiti houses. By understanding such mechanics, this study will examine two layers of living societies, contained in a same structural frame, overlapped spatially and temporally in the physical world, but separated and isolated in a virtual one. Their spaces within the Kuwaiti house can reveal many aspect of the relationship between them. While the Kuwaiti house, itself, since the discovery of the oil has faced many dramatic changes, the configuration of the domestic workers’ spaces was consequently affected. Many different house plans, that belongs to different time periods, witness the socio-spatial shift in relationships between the households and the workers. This chapter will present the house plans of two governmental housing solutions: the plot and loan option and state ready-built houses. Both such solutions were offered to help middle-income groups.

I. Historical Background:

In pre-oil Kuwait, domestic work was performed exclusively by the housewife or by slaves. Slaves were mainly owned by the upper classes including some of the royal family. By the turn of the 20th century, Kuwait’s population was 37,000 people among which there were 4,000 slaves.\(^{32}\) The slaves mainly came from Africa to the Gulf region. Considering the central position of the Kuwaiti port in the Middle East, it held a major role in trading routes from Africa or India

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(especially countries with no outlet to the Gulf Sea). The Kuwaiti economy depended on those trade routes to India, pearl diving and the sale of African slaves. A special place in old Kuwait City (pre-1950s) was called the slaves market (سوق العبيد).  

Slaves lived closely with their masters, sharing their everyday lives with them. Merchants and elites would have many slaves, who occupied separate quarters outside the main house. By contrast, in middle-class families, slaves would not have an assigned space in the house; rather, they would sleep on the roof and keep their belongings beneath the stairs. Some would have a windowless room between the ground level and roof level. It is clear that slaves were part of family life despite the clear distinction in class.

House type

Any Kuwaiti house, was surrounded by walls that could reach three feet in thickness and twenty-four feet in height. The outer wall presented a fortified nature unlike the inner walls of the house, which were standard walls of six-inch thickness and nine feet in height. The huge dimensions of the exterior walls provided privacy as well as fortification. This protection was necessary because of the nature of the jobs of most Kuwaiti men (e.g., pearl diving and trade journeys), which took up to six months and resulted in long absences from their homes. Men thus fortified their homes with large walls to protect them from intruders from aggressors, which wished

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34 Ibid, pp.122
to annex Kuwait to claim its strategic location and port.

The socioeconomic status of the Kuwaiti family in this period, was expressed in both the scale of their domestic residence and the proportion of the gender-specific spaces within it. In Kuwaiti houses, the men’s section contains the *diwanyah* (الديوانية), where men socialize with other male guests. The *diwanyah* is the main space in which different generations can meet to discuss the political, economic, and social aspects of life or just enjoy a chat. It is thus the main male-oriented social hub where females are not welcomed. The spaces in Al-Bader House were thus gendered and structured unequally in favor of men because of their relative power. As Daphne Spain explains, “spatial arrangement causes status arrangement.”

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The woman in old Kuwaiti houses (pre-1950s) socialize with other women in their private space. The women’s section is screened by many layers to ensure privacy for women to get unveiled. Haram Al-Hareem (women’s section) is thus considered to be the main social hub for women in Kuwait. It is also where the family would gather to eat their meals. The women’s section is typically positioned deep inside the house with no access to the outer world, thereby keeping females secluded from the political, economic, and social life outside. The women at that time were not encouraged to go out and mingle with men; they only ventured out in emergencies, for celebrations, or to bring in food supplies. In contrast to their slaves, who were responsible to assist their mistress by going to the souk and obtaining their needs. The slaves and servants at this time, did not have specific and clear job descriptions, but they would do whatever their mistresses and masters ordered. They used to give baths, dress, comb the hair and clean the rooms of their mistress. While, male slaves and servants, used to clean male spaces of the house and deliver food from the kitchen court to male court when guests are there. Their duties extended to walking animals during daytime, taking care of the house and protecting their mistress when the master is traveling in the long boat trade journeys. There was no dressing code for slaves or servants, but they were prohibited to act or wear like their mistress and masters. The gender segregation of the community and its spaces was stretched to be applied on the slaves and servants, the female slaves’/servant rooms were in the family court next to the main door connecting the family court to the kitchen court. Male servants/slaves were residing in the business court, while young boys stayed in a room in the animal court. Usually the most favored slave to the master is the one to prepare and serve his Arabic coffee, and he is the one that the master arranges his marriage to one of the young female slaves in the house. The newly wedded couple would be given a special room

in the business court. Slaves or servants at this time knew the Arabic language, spoke it in the Kuwaiti dialect, understood the culture and were part of the community. Singing and dancing in weddings and happy occasions was performed by them.

**Abolishing Slavery**

The British first arrived in the Gulf region as early as the 1800s. Thereafter, they attempted to introduce extraterritorial jurisdiction and commercial law courts besides Islamic Sharia to protect foreign merchants. One of the key British rules was to abolish slavery. However, the many attempts made by the British were rejected by the Kuwaiti elites. By 1890, the British mission of ending slavery had lost its intensity. Slave trading thus remained a main part of the Gulf economy, especially in Kuwait where the market for private slaves or divers for pearling at large. After the discovery of oil in Kuwait in 1945, pearling and slave trading began to decline. Then, in 1953, Kuwait and Qatar prohibited slave trading, followed – a decade later – by Saudi Arabia and Oman.

The British estimated the cost of freeing slaves and compensating owners for their expenses incurred in raising their slaves from childhood to be £225,000 per slave.\(^{38}\) Two anthropologists who worked in Suhar believed that the majority of slaves were freed in Oman and then migrated to Kuwait as free labor.\(^{39}\)

\([^ {38} Miers, Suzanne. *Slavery in the Twentieth Century: The Evolution of a Global Problem.* (California: AltaMira Press, 2003), pp. 342\]
\([^ {39} Ibid, pp. 346\]
Kuwaiti authorities rejected any British interference in their process of abolishing slave trading and slavery. This process started in 1964 after the economic shift of Kuwait from slave trading and pearling to an oil-based economy. Many of the slaves in Kuwait were freed by their masters and granted Kuwaiti citizenship. They thus became Kuwaitis, holding their master’s last name to show that they are under his protection. Kuwaiti people still identify the extended families of ex-slaves and some still have strong relationships with their ancestor’s master. Many slaves left Kuwait, while others remained living with their masters. “In Kuwait, an edict forbidding the import of slaves and all trafficking in them..but domestic slavery still existed and many domestic slaves who came from a slave family preferred to remain under the protection of their masters than enter the competitive world.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Males</th>
<th>(%)</th>
<th>Females</th>
<th>(%)</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Domestic workers as % of population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1975</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>11,921</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1.2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>9,281</td>
<td>(32.2)</td>
<td>19,552</td>
<td>(67.8)</td>
<td>28,833</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985</td>
<td>18,323</td>
<td>(22.5)</td>
<td>63,250</td>
<td>(77.5)</td>
<td>81,573</td>
<td>4.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>28,836</td>
<td>(21.8)</td>
<td>103,395</td>
<td>(78.2)</td>
<td>132,231</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>26,081</td>
<td>(18.1)</td>
<td>117,648</td>
<td>(81.9)</td>
<td>143,729</td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>57,442</td>
<td>(28.8)</td>
<td>142,208</td>
<td>(71.2)</td>
<td>199,648</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1: Number and Percentage of male and female domestic servants in Kuwait.

On the other hand, the issuance of a specified type of visa for domestic workers (Visa 20) started a fierce competition between six Asian countries\textsuperscript{41} to feed the Gulf with workers.\textsuperscript{42} Comparing many statistics, one can note a trend of one nationality exceeding the others every few years. Below is a graph showing the growing numbers of migrant domestic servants coming to Kuwait (Table 1.)

II. Typological evolution of Kuwaiti Houses and their domestic workers’ spaces

A. Physical barriers

I. 1960’s-1970s Domestic Workers’ Spaces:

During this period of the abolishing of slavery and trading in slaves, the country was going through rapid development and carrying out huge infrastructure projects that needed a large number of skilled and unskilled migrant workers. Although the British were aware of the use of slaves as workers in oil fields in other Gulf countries, no report was written about Kuwait’s violation of the slavery laws. Indeed, Kuwait was the first destination in the Gulf for freed slaves to pursue their first contracted jobs as free men.\textsuperscript{43}

Between the 1960s and the late 1970s, the majority of domestic workers were Arab couples

\textsuperscript{41} India, Sri-Lanka, Philippines, Indonesia, Nepal and Bangladesh.
\textsuperscript{42} The oil boom in Kuwait, let to another phenomenon of foreign workers outnumbering the native Kuwaiti population. In 1965, Kuwaiti citizens made only 47.1\% of the population. See: Al-Mughni, Haya. \textit{Women in Kuwait: The Politics of Gender.} (London: Saqi Books. 1993), pp. 32
\textsuperscript{43} Miers, Suzanne. \textit{Slavery in the Twentieth Century: The Evolution of a Global Problem.} (California: AltaMira Press, 2003) p. 346
and young Arabs. Many Arabs migrated to Kuwait to fill jobs with higher salaries than those offered to them in their countries of origin. Many female Arabs with a low educational background accompanying their husbands or fathers to Kuwait offered their labor to rich Kuwaiti families. This group of domestic servants were invisible to many statistics because of the type of visa they held. They came to Kuwait under three main residencies permits before the issuance of Visa 20 for domestic workers; they were either in Kuwait with their migrated families or they had migrated to Kuwait on a visiting visa or working visa. No clear statistics in Kuwait show the population of Arab domestic workers in Kuwait in that period. However, most were from Egypt, Lebanon, Iraq, and Oman. Domestic work needed no skill, which encouraged many Arab women in need of money to come and live in a secure domestic space.

Arab domestic servants shared many commonalities with their employers such as the Arabic language, culture, and Islamic religion. In the few cases they were not Muslim, they had at least a clear understanding of Islamic values. These shared values helped build a common understanding between employer and employee. Trust was the main gain for employees, as was visible in their spaces within Kuwaiti houses.

**Plot and Loan Houses:**

Fig. 8, shows a common house type from the 1960s to the 1970s. Many factors made this specific building design predominant, such as building codes. These houses demonstrate the large shift in Kuwaiti dwellings from the inward courtyard Arabic houses to outward western ones.
This British-influenced archetype disassociates the workers’ rooms from the family house to be attached to outside service spaces, introducing a clear distinction between the production spaces from the consumption ones. A long building at the back contained a laundry room, ironing room, kitchen, female domestic workers’ room, and a male drivers’ room. When employing an Arab family, the domestic workers space would comprise two rooms and a small kitchenette. Meanwhile, the Kuwaiti family lived in a separate square building overlooking the main street. These two separate buildings were contained by a fence with one main door and a garage door, as shown in Figure 8.

Fig. 8: House Plan built in 1970s.
This change in design was accompanied by a demographic change in domestic labours, from African slaves or workers to migrated live-in Iraqi or Yemeni couples working in the same house with the male as a driver and the female as a domestic worker. This particular period is the only time in Kuwaiti domestic servant history that the workers’ spaces were more than a bedroom and a bathroom. A larger separate space was given to the family, which consisted of two bedrooms, a kitchen, and bathroom. When the domestic workers had children, they played with the employer’s children and attended the same school. Female domestic labour used to clean the house, cook the food, and clean the laundry. Because of their family responsibilities, they had more respected start and finish times. In other cases, Kuwaiti families employed an Arab domestic servant and an Asian (mostly from India or Sri Lanka) or Arab driver. These workers would have separate rooms in the service quarter, but may share a bathroom. Male and female workers would eat separately. Figure 8, shows an example of the organization of the rooms.

In the studied area, houses consisting of two separate buildings: one was larger and was centered on the plot and the second was a row of rooms at the back of the house. These two buildings were separated by the backyard. The large centered building was the employer’s space including bedrooms, living rooms, bathrooms, storages, a salon, and a second kitchen. The back building had a row of rooms for the servants’ quarters, the cook’s room, the laundry room with an attached ironing area, and the main kitchen.
State-built Housing:

Fig. 9: State ready-built house type, built and distributed in the first housing plan period.

Legend:

First Floor:
- 1 Main entrance
- 2 Salon
- 3 Dining rm
- 4 living rm
- 5 Guest toilet
- 6 Kitchen
- 7 Laundry rm
- 8 Domestic worker rm (DWR)

Second Floor:
- 1 Master Bed-rm
- 2 Bed rm
- 3 Male driver rm
- 4 Toilet

Legend:

First Floor:
- 1 Main entrance
- 2 Salon
- 3 Dining rm
- 4 living rm
- 5 Guest toilet
- 6 Kitchen
- 7 Laundry rm
- 8 Domestic worker rm (DWR)
- 9 Male driver rm

Second Floor:
- 1 Master Bed-rm
- 2 Bed rm
- 4 Toilet

Fig. 10: State ready-built house type, built and distributed in the first housing plan period.
At this time, the National Housing Welfare (NHA) launched its first housing plan (1976–1981) that resulted in building 1,751 middle-income housing units in six areas: Khaitan, Khaitan extension, Mishref, Ardhyah, Hadyah and Bayan. These units were built on 405 square meter (4,357 square feet) plots and had two doors: one at the front of the house and the second at the back. Each house had two floors; the first floor consisted of a domestic workers’ room (and bathroom), male driver’s room (and bathroom), laundry room, kitchen, salon, living room and guest bathroom. The second floor consisted of a master bedroom (with changing room and bathroom), two children’s bedrooms and a children’s bathroom. Figure 9 and 10 shows two different house prototypes.

While the house was the home of the Kuwaiti family, it was the working space for their domestic labours, which made having “social boundaries” a necessity to maintain the privacy of the family space and the power of the employer over the workers. As Higman, a Professor of History and the author of Domestic Service in Australia, states, “domestic servants occupied the architectural and social space of their employers in various ways, the manners and nature of which was controlled by design and planning as well as customary rule-making.” For the employer, privacy was maintained by both physical and psychological fences. When analyzing some of the Kuwaiti houses built in the 1960s and 1970s, one can investigate the design of spaces to expose the different kinds of barriers.

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44 The NHA first housing plan executed a total of 19,092 housing units distributed as following: 9,696 very low-income housing units, 7,645 low-income housing units and 1,751 middle-income housing units. For more information, see: The National Housing Authority. Al-Kitab al-Sanawi 1981 [Year Book 1981]. (Kuwait: MOI Press, 1990), pp. 26

Space analysis

In this part, the architecture of Kuwaiti houses is analyzed to answer a number of questions: How was architecture used as a tool to separate or connect the inhabitants of Kuwaiti houses? How did domestic workers’ spaces fit within the wider house? And in what way were the different domestic workers’ spaces related to each other?

• ‘Justified Access map’

Studying the accessibility of different people in the house is crucial to assess the ease of travelling between different spaces. Understanding the permeability of a house’s spaces can be achieved in many ways. The technique used in this study is the permeable map or “justified access
map” explained in the methodology.

Figure 11 shows the state-built house (model 2). This figure illustrates that the house spaces were clustered in three groups: the service group including the domestic workers’ rooms, their bathrooms, laundry room and the kitchen; the guests group including the dining room, salon and living room; and the private group with the family’s bedrooms and bathrooms. Every group has direct access between its spaces but indirect access to other groups’ spaces. Indirect access can be stairs or having to go outside to re-enter, whereas direct access is an open space or a single door. It is clear from the map that domestic workers had to pass through the kitchen to be able to enter the house spaces. The Figure shows that their connection to the family space was through the kitchen and dining room. Nonetheless, domestic workers had a clear path to the outside world from their rooms.

- Doors stairs and distances passed

Building on the previous analysis of accessibility to the domestic workers’ room, in this section architectural obstacles such as doors and stairs between domestic workers’ rooms and the rest of the house are counted. Social distancing between a group of people can be achieved by using many architectural tools to maintain the borders. These tools include the distance traveled between one room and another, number of doors crossed, number of stairs climbed or having to go outside to enter a specific space. In this sense, the servants’ rooms in relation to the other spaces of the house are investigated.

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### House type I. Khaitan (1978):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domestic servant room to:</th>
<th>Number of stairs to climb</th>
<th>Number of doors to cross</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundry area</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salon</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family living room</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dining room</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family bedrooms</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### House type II. Khaitan (1978):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domestic servant room to:</th>
<th>Number of stairs to climb</th>
<th>Number of doors to cross</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundry area</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salon</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family living room</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dining room</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family bedrooms</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the number of doors passed through to get to a space serves as a social distancing device, then the table above shows that domestic workers are more welcome in the kitchen and laundry.
room than in the salon. Furthermore, the family bedrooms are 18 steps and four doors away from the domestic workers’ room. A domestic worker’s route to the family bedrooms is convoluted. Hence, the numbers of doors and stairs in the table resemble built obstacles to safeguard the privacy of certain spaces.

- **Grouping of spaces**

  In this part, the sequence of spaces following the domestic workers’ room is described to examine whether the organization of rooms in different NHA house designs followed a similar pattern. This will help explain the NHA ideology of domestic workers’ spaces. In the NHA dwellings presented above, both have a similar sequence of spaces. Domestic workers’ rooms are followed by the male driver’s room (and his bathroom), laundry room and kitchen. In most designs, the grouping of spaces following the servants’ rooms were as follows: domestic servants’ room/male driver’s room/laundry/kitchen. The types of spaces clustered with domestic workers’ rooms were all service functions.

**II. 1980s-1990s Domestic Workers’ Spaces:**

**Plot and Land Houses:**

The Kuwaiti houses of the 1980s were not significantly different from the previous examples of the 1960s and 1970s. However, in the 1990s, a small change in some newly built houses was made. The female servants’ rooms, laundry room and ironing room were relocated to the third floor of the family house. The rooms for the driver and cook remained outside the family house. This marked the start of gender segregation for domestic workers’ rooms, as explained in detail in the following chapter. Below is a sample of those houses:
Fig. 12: House plan of Kuwaiti house built in 1990s
State-built Housing:

In the second housing plan of the NHA, new middle-income housing units were built in two areas: Alsawaber and Sabah Al-Salem. A total of 3,214 housing units were built and distributed among Kuwaiti families. The following house plans are for the Ardhyah housing units. Each plot area was 600 square meters (6,456 square feet) and consisted of two floors. On the first floor was the salon, dining room, living room, office room, guest toilet, kitchen, laundry room, domestic workers’ room and domestic workers’ bathroom. The second floor had the living room, master bedroom, three other bedrooms, two bathrooms and a kitchenette. Below are the house plans:

Fig 13: House plan for Ardhyah state-built houses (model1).
### 1981 Ardhya house type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domestic servant room to</th>
<th>Number of stairs to climb</th>
<th>Number of doors to cross</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kitchen</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundry area</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Salon</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family living room</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dining room</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family bedrooms</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outdoor</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### III. 2000s Domestic Workers’ Spaces:

#### Plot and Land Houses:

#### House type

The NHA, decreased the plot areas distributed in the plot and loan option from 750 m² and 1000 m² to 500 m² and 400 m² plot area. Reducing the plot size cut many of the privileges of Kuwaitis such as the front- and backyards and the separate production quarter at the back of the house. Newly built houses were compacted and stretched to use all the available plot area. However, this new government adjustment affected the older neighborhoods areas in Al-Asimah, and a new attempt to halve the plot area and sell each at a high price started to occur. A new 500 m² plot areas then started to arise in the old neighborhoods of the Al-Asimah province.
The domestic servants’ rooms in these newly built houses underwent major changes. The female servants’ rooms, laundry room, ironing room, and servants’ bathroom were relocated to the top level of the house and became the service floor. This floor was mostly used only for services, and servants rarely shared the floor with their employer. While having a service area on the third floor was an alternative in earlier examples, it was no longer an option given the smaller plot size. However, the male driver or cook’s room remained outside the house, as did the main kitchen.
**Profession**

In this period, we can note the greater involvement of domestic workers in family life. We started to have different professions within the domestic space such as house cleaners, cooks, nannies, elderly helpers, gardeners, and drivers. Moreover, the number of domestic workers in each home increased, making the house more like an organization, with each worker having a specific job description.

**State-built Housing:**

The Public Authority for Housing Welfare (PAHW) continued the National Housing Welfare mission. PAHW started with the fourth housing plan and proceeded to the most recent

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**Fig. 15: House plan for 2014 state-built house (model E)**

Legend:

**First Floor:**
1. Main entrance
2. Salon
3. Dining rm
4. Living rm
5. Office
6. Guest toilet
7. Kitchen
8. Male driver rm

**Second Floor:**
1. Living rm
2. Master bed-rm
3. Bed rm
4. Kitchenette
5. Toilet

**Third Floor:**
1. Domestic worker rm (DWR)
2. Laundry rm

- DW Spaces
- Family Spaces
one, the ninth housing plan.

**B. Social barriers**

Kuwaiti citizens and their migrant domestic workers were two separate lives inhabiting one house. Sharing one space for a long period of time pulled them close to each other, which made the homeowners use many social distancing devices to maintain their power over the domestic workers to constantly remind them of their duties toward their employer. The family devised a set of rules that helped codify labours’ spaces and created social boundaries to protect their private life. The Kuwaiti family would modify or add rules to cope with new problems in everyday life. If social boundaries in the Kuwaiti house were drawn, one can trace the changing social maps over time with the change in domestic labours’ origin, religion, culture, and language. Although the physical world of the Kuwaiti house remained the same, social reality would change with a change in occupants.

Jane Rendell, stated:

> Societies have generated their own rules, culturally determined, for making boundaries on the ground, and have divided the social into spheres, levels and territories with invisible fences and platforms to be scaled by abstract ladders and crossed by intangible bridges.\(^48\)

> This means that the architectural design never provided a complete sense of the social life played out inside; rather, we should consider the social boundaries inside.

\(^{48}\) Rendell, Jane. *Gender, Space, Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 113
Pei-Chia Lan, a sociology professor at National Taiwan University, explains that these boundaries:

are constituted on multiple levels – the cognitive, interactive, and institutional. On the mental level, we perceive the world through making distinctions in everyday life. On the institutional level, social classification such as racial taxonomy in national censuses or occupational schemes divided by professional groups embodies the symbolic politics of domination and resistance. Privileged social groups tend to safeguard boundaries and consolidate the status quo by excluding others. Other groups seek inclusion by making the boundaries permeable or reconstructing alternative boundaries.49

The house rules were unwritten, passed from the employer to the domestic servants and from older servants to new. The main set of rules in Kuwait for dealing with domestic servants was called “the maids’ etiquette” according to information taken from women’s columns in Kuwaiti newspapers, articles, and women’s blogs.50

- **Unwritten rules**

In the different time periods presented in this study, the social distancing between employer and employee changed. For Arab domestic workers, the common culture and language helped build a common base for the employee/employer relationship. In this time period, the employer did not have to implement as many rules as they did in later times with different migrant workers.


50 A widespread forum is q8yat (Kuwaiti women), which has 428,711 registered members. In this forum, women discuss and share their social advice, food recipes, local news and everything concerning women’s life in Kuwait including domestic servant etiquette and what to teach your new servant. [http://www.q8yat.com/t266193.html](http://www.q8yat.com/t266193.html) [accessed on Oct 10, 2017].
Further, with the shift in the ethnicity of servants, the social boundaries between employer and employee started to widen at this point. For example, the unwritten rules tightened and started to include hygiene rules. The house rules started by regulating the entering and exiting of the family home, which required the maids to use the inner kitchen door (back door). Maids were not allowed to use the front door of the house. Upon entering the house, they ought to change their shoes to the clean shoes kept next to the door to ensure no wet or dirt from the backyard service area entered the house. Moreover, they must move quietly in the house, never speak in a high tone or sing, and remain in a low tone at all times. Their gestures and body language had to show respect when talking to the mistress of the house. Communication and orders were only taken by the mistress and never with the masters.

Domestic workers enter the house to clean rooms, wipe floors, collect dirty laundry, and serve meals or afternoon tea. They must never use anything in the house for personal needs or to satisfy their curiosity. They were not allowed to touch personal items or sit on any furniture in the house; they were always seen standing up or leaning to clean. They were only allowed to sit on the floor when the nanny is watching the children playing, studying, or watching TV, or in the kitchen in special chairs different in design and material to the household chairs. During waking hours, the back door or kitchen door would be open for the female maids to enter and clean. At night, the master of the house would shut all the doors, even the back door in the family kitchen. The interior was considered to be a private space for the household. Indeed, the maids must have

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51 On the earlier mentioned forum q8yat, one member asked, “How do I deal with my new maid?” Another participant answered: “Maids come from different environments, don’t be surprised by their odd practices or neglect of personal hygiene. You must train her to take a bath after work, clean things as soon as she can. You have to check on her every now and then.” See: http://www.q8yat.com/t766091.html [accessed on Oct 10, 2017].

52 Data were gathered from Kuwaiti newspapers, Kuwaiti blogs, and women’s magazines.
no private time in the house. When working in the house, they were prohibited from shutting any doors to ensure the mistress could watch them. Any violation of the rules or unregulated movement would alert the mistress of their disobedient behavior. For male drivers, the rules were different. Drivers would only enter the house when heavy lifting was required; then, special arrangements would be made to clear a path. The women in the house would either cover up in decent clothing or stay in their private rooms with the door shut. On entering the house, his eyes must be looking toward the floor and never raised.

- **Time schedule**

  The housework was divided into chores to be carried out at a specific time of the day. Nabeela M., a Kuwaiti citizen, states that the “cleaning of the salon, dining room, living room and family kitchen is all done early morning. While room cleaning is done before noon prayer. Servants clean after Lunch and then, no servant is allowed in the family house until sunset prayer. Between sunset prayer to night prayer,\(^{53}\) they prepare dinner. After night prayer, we lock the doors and no servant enter our house until early morning when I unlock the kitchen door.”\(^{54}\)

  However, Nabeela explains that they also have fixed times for chores. They further have private family time after lunch until sunset and after nighttime until early morning. According to Fawzia A., “without a fixed schedule, we wouldn’t have control over our house.” She adds that any break in the fixed timing by the servant is considered a warning that he or she is up to something. She further explains an incident when her servant was putting out the garbage around

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\(^{53}\) Prayer time is widely used in Kuwait to define time. The five prayers in Islam depend on the sun’s position in the sky.

\(^{54}\) M., Nabeela. In discussion with the author. Kuwait, June 20, 2017.
midday, which was not the fixed time for garbage. Then, she knew that she was planning something. She says, “I caught her selling some of the things she stole from my house.” The fixed timing of chores is an unwritten rule that helps the employer control his or her private life. This chores schedule helped in controlling the domestic workers movement and regulating their accessibility of house spaces. In some extreme cases, one could find a written schedule in the kitchen. This is similar to the controlled movement of French servants in the 1800s where the family members move clockwise between rooms, while servants move anticlockwise.

- **Dress code: Reinforcing the class distinction**

  The statistics in the table below (table 2.) show that the majority of domestic servants in Kuwait have no formal education. Many came from the rural areas of their country, where they did not complete their education and where they had no access to technology. Some needed education in basic hygiene and general etiquette; those facts helped construct a general perception of migrated Asian servants in Kuwaiti eyes, reconfirming the class distinction between employers and domestic servants. Neha Vora, states that “middle class Indians also blamed migrants for the racism they experienced in their own lives, arguing that because uneducated and unskilled workers constitute the majority of south Asians in the Gulf, people assume all Indians are uneducated and unskilled.” This class issue was reflected in the accommodation and spaces of domestic servants. Their rooms were constructed of cheaper, lower quality materials than in the rest of the house. As an example, when constructing the stairs, the expensive marble would discontinue at the third floor.

and cheap porcelain would take over to the servants’ floor. Some employers would let four servants share a 5×5 m (16.4x16.4 ft.) room. Any elevator put in these houses would discontinue at the third floor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>PAK/BANG/IND</th>
<th>Other Asians</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illiterate or Read/Write</td>
<td>75.7</td>
<td>92.5</td>
<td>85.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secondary and below University</td>
<td>14.6</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University +</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.: Educational level of domestic servants in Kuwait 1983.

Domestic workers were obliged to follow strict hygiene rules and dress in a special uniform that objectified and unified all the maids and reminded them of the class distinction between them and their employers. They were also directed to address their mistress with “madam” and never her name. The house rules reinforced the class and race distinction and helped the employer ignore their existence in his home. These rules built invisible walls between the household and domestic workers, separating the two different worlds in the same shared space.
C. General themes found in Domestic workers’ spaces

I. Captive worker

Most of the plot and land houses, built during the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s were raised by four or more steps from the street level, regardless of whether they had a basement or not. As the house was raised but the service area at the back was at the street level, this allowed for a full view of the surrounding yard from inside.

Daphne Spain uses the panopticon concept and its use of architecture to understand the notion of power. “The use of architecture to reinforce prevailing patterns of privilege and to assert power is a concept dating from the eighteenth century with Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon. A circular building of cell like partitions, the panopticon had at its center a tower allowing a supervisor to observe the occupants of each room. A window at the rear of each cell illuminated the occupant, and side walls prevented contact of occupants with each other. Such surveillance and separation inhibited the contagion of criminal behavior (in prison), disease (in hospital), or insanity (in asylums).”59 In the panopticon design, power was stressed through architecture to impose control, surveillance, and separation on those who are institutionalized. Similarly, in Kuwaiti houses, spatial arrangements were used to impose the same qualities of the panopticon but here the aim was to control the servants of the house.

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The servants’ section was windowless and had no direct door; thus, it was unconnected to the outside world. Servants were forced to pass through the yards at the side of the house to leave the premises. The family section was usually raised and full of windows, allowing the full surveillance of servants’ movements, reflecting the type of control practiced by gaoler over prisoners.

In the house types built after the 1990s, many dwelling designs repositioned female domestic workers’ rooms to the third floor as explained earlier, where they were isolated from the world and buffered by the family spaces. This sense of imprisonment continued as female workers rarely ventured outside the family house. Many employers prevented their workers from exiting the premises of the house to protect them.

Female domestic workers’ spaces in recent designs have lost their direct connection to the outside world. In most designs, they are forced to pass through the family spaces to leave the house. This mediation of the female body can be seen as an act of control and surveillance. When looking at their isolated spaces above the family house, a sense of imprisoning could be felt.

II. Concealed spaces

Most of the Kuwaiti house types presented in this study or in the NHA annual book demonstrate different solutions to conceal the servants’ spaces within the family house. In the early examples of the 1970s and 1980s, servants’ spaces were designed on one story placed at the back of the house, while the family dwelling was over two stories in the center of the plot area, screening
the service area behind it. Since the 2000s, when service areas were repositioned to the third floor, the service quarters have mostly occupied the back corner of the third floor. No sign of the servants’ rooms can be seen when passing by – from a street viewpoint – these newly built neighborhoods.
Chapter 3: Gender and Space

Even when domestic work became waged labor, gender inequality continued. This raises questions, such as what difference did gender make to the job description of domestic workers, and 3) how was that reflected in their spaces within Kuwaiti houses?

1. Gender/Classification of work; inside and outside

In 1970s state-built housing designs, domestic servants’ rooms were labelled by gender and work type, such as ghurfat al-khadin (female domestic servants’ room خرقة الخادمة), ghurfat al-saeq (male drivers’ room خرقة السائق) and ghurfat al-murabyah (female nannies’ room خرقة المرببة). The gendering of work was thus strongly present in the government design of housing spaces. This raises the question of how domestic chores moved from being carried out by unpaid women (e.g. wives) to become a waged task that included both genders. This classification of housework might have started when married servants worked together in Kuwaiti houses.

Many married couples from Arab countries migrated in the 1960s from rural areas of Iraq or Yemen to become domestic servant in Kuwait. The woman of the couple helped clean the house, make the beds for the family and prepare meals. She entered the house in the morning when the master had already left and usually finished her work before he returned. The Arab culture of gender segregation is highly valued among household workers from rural areas and their Kuwaiti employers.

The male servant would be assigned the job of driving as well as caring for the exterior gardens and the diwanyah. He was not allowed in the house, especially when the mistress was
present. Hence, the inner work of the house was carried on by the female domestic worker, while the exterior work was assigned to her husband.

The consequent spatial segregation of work thus created two separate work spheres, namely the outward sphere and the inward sphere. This division of labor set the stage for the classification of work between male and female domestic workers; the interior work was more delicate and detailed, and therefore was considered more suited and culturally related to women. Exterior work involved heavy lifting and harder labor, which was generally allocated to the men.

Another outcome of the gender classification of work could have been the Kuwaiti culture of segregating spaces in houses by gender. Spaces in traditional Kuwaiti houses are culturally codified depending on gender and kin relations. Such houses had many levels of privacy, such as the male space of the diwanyah, which welcomed male friends and family members, the salon, in which male and female close family members could gather, and the private second floor area for nuclear family members. This gendering of home spaces made it hard to accept the existence of a male domestic servant in family areas. Some believe that Islamic values contributed to this situation by encouraging women to show decency and concealment from unrelated men. Many Islamic scholars have translated Qur’anic verses on the hijab to mean the physical segregation of unrelated men and women in the private spaces of houses rather than the fabric scarf covering the head and chest” hijab. to mean “curtain” (its literal meaning) in the sense of separation or partition.” 60

The *diwanyah* room is a surviving gendered element from the old courtyard houses of Kuwait. This element survived all the dramatic changes that affected the Kuwaiti house. This space was used only by men to socialize and discuss politics, the economy and social matters in Kuwait. Even cleaning the space or serving tea, coffee and food to guests must be performed by a male worker. In some cases, a special male worker was assigned to this space, who was trained to prepare Arabic coffee and tea as well as to understand Kuwait’s cultural and social hierarchies, such as the position in which to start when serving coffee (from right to left or from oldest to youngest). In addition, he would need to understand the protocols related to coffee drinking, such as which sign means to pour more coffee into someone’s cup and which sign means to take the cup.

When domestic service was no longer supplied by a married couple; Kuwaiti houses started to employ single male and female workers. Departing from the gender-typed job ideology, most linen-related work, childcare and kitchen work was carried out by female domestic servants, leaving the male servants other jobs such as driving, gardening and cooking in some cases. The gender classification of work is vital question, that many scholars around the world have questioned the origin of it, for example Cissie Fairchild, a history professor, stated: “Evidently the question of the sexual division of labour in the domestic sphere was not to be explained unproblematically either as an outcome of women’s “natural” capabilities for homemaking and child care or as an obvious or automatic transfer of talents from the home to the labour market”61

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2. Women’s Burden

The Kuwaiti cultural gender-role ideology continued to dominate, overcoming all the major political and economic social changes that had touched Kuwaiti lives in the past decades. Even with the high number of Kuwaiti women joining the labor force, their culture-typed jobs remained their own burden. The master/servant relationship became the mistress/servant relationship considering that anything related to housekeeping or childrearing was deemed to be women’s responsibility. Even if she was not doing the housework physically, she was still responsible for the servants working in the house. Any fault in the cleaning of the house or problems with the food prepared by the cook are seen as the mistress having given insufficient training to her maids. In upper-class families, a special domestic worker with long experience would be responsible for the younger and less experienced workers. The role of the man of the house in domestic work is limited to official works such as registering the worker’s name under his Kafala\(^62\) and handling wages every month. In many cases, the female worker is prohibited from talking to the master.

As the number of working married women in Kuwait rose, the number of female Asian migrants that began to work as nannies or domestic servants\(^63\). This phenomenon was a major concern to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to the extent that in 1983\(^64\) it called for regional research investigating the rising number of domestic servants and the implication on the upbringing of children. Three studies were conducted in Kuwait: The Ministry and Social Affairs

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\(^{62}\) Kafala: Sponsorship system that used to monitor the migrant labors in working force or domestic work. Migrated workers must have a Kuwaiti sponsor who is responsible of their visa and legal status. The Kuwaiti law deny Kafala to be under female citizen unless she is widow or divorced.


The GCC prepared regional media campaigns addressing this phenomenon. In 1980s, many TV ads\(^{65}\) showed the need for women to return to their responsibilities and not rely on domestic workers, particularly in terms of raising and caring for their children. In one ad, an Asian domestic worker is shown in the airport leaving Kuwait; the departure of her flight is announced and a Kuwaiti child is crying and holding her, telling her not to go away. The ad thus shows an Asian migrated domestic worker crying at having to leave her employer’s child –whom she raised-, the child also crying because she is leaving him while the mistress is trying to pull her child away. This ad is part of a social media ads campaign that tries to highlight the major concerns in society. One can see in the ad suggestion that the culturally assigned women role of child caring is being compromised by the existence of the domestic servant. On the contrary, the father is rarely shown in these ads, or is seen for only a couple of seconds in the whole ad.

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\(^{65}\) This Ad was part of raising awareness campaign financed by the GCC Joint Program Production Institution.
Domestic servant spaces in relation to other house spaces

Male workers’ spaces vs. female workers’ spaces

Kuwaiti law requires the employer of a domestic worker to provide her/him with suitable accommodation. The Domestic Service Administration (DSA) of the Ministry of the Interior sets the rules for domestic servant recruitment agencies. Kuwaiti law number 68/2015 regarding domestic service states that “the DSA should make sure that every working contract issued by them and signed by both the employer and domestic worker agency should secure a number of rights for the benefit of the domestic servant, such as; providing clothing, housing and medical care if needed.”66 The law requires the employer to provide living accommodation within his/her house; however, it does not define what is suitable accommodation for domestic servants. Despite this, the majority of government-built houses67 have a specific room and bathroom for domestic servants, as seen in Chapter 2.

Female domestic servants’ Spaces

Although most domestic servants have a private room in the houses of Kuwaiti employers, many female workers share a room. In some cases, three or four female domestic workers share a room and a bathroom. It is rare to have more than one room allocated to female domestic workers. These rooms are furnished with basic furniture and have air-conditioning. Since the majority of Kuwaiti houses have more than one female domestic worker, bunk beds are widely used. Domestic workers also usually have a dedicated bathroom either in the room or close to their room.

67 Government built houses for Middle-income group.
The size of female domestic servants’ rooms in state-built houses started at an average of 5.6 square meters (60.25 square feet) in 1978 designs and dropped to 6.5 square meters (70 square feet) in 2014 designs.

**Male domestic servants’ Spaces**

Male domestic servants’ rooms were usually located on the ground floor or basement (mostly in custom-designed houses by owners). The size of their rooms varied from 9.8 square meters (105.5 square feet) in 1978 to 8.6 square meters (92.5 square feet).

**A. The relationship of the workers’ spaces one to another**

In the early designs of National Housing Authority (NHA) in 1978 (i.e. the first or second housing plan), most house designs consisted of both male and female domestic workers’ rooms. All the executed designs in the first housing plan (1976–1981) grouped male and female rooms either horizontally or vertically through private stairs or corridors. By contrast, the designs in the second housing plan (1981–1986) had only one domestic servants’ room and a bathroom labelled ‘the female nanny room’ (غرفة المربية). There is no explanation for this change. Yet, in the third NHA housing plan (1986–1990), houses were designed with both male and female servants’ rooms.

In the first NHA housing plan, male and female domestic servants’ rooms were treated equally in terms of their connection to the broader organization of the house, proximity to the outside
world (both have two doors to pass to get outside the house) and placement within the production spaces of the house (laundry and kitchen). All designs included a bathroom for each room. In the many designs of the Plot and Land option, owners built one shared bathroom for both male and female servants.

B. Gender and the servant spaces relation to the larger organization of the house

Between examples of Kuwaiti houses from 1964 to 1980s, one can notice the segregation between the family spaces and servants’ spaces, keeping male and female servants outdoors. In some cases, servants shared a wall or a toilet. Most Kuwaiti houses built before the 1980s consisted of two buildings: the family dwelling and the production area at the back. The production area generally housed the male and female domestic workers’ rooms, workers’ bathroom, laundry room and main kitchen. This situation changed gradually to include the female domestic worker within the family house and keep the male servant in an exterior room with no access to the house.

Gender Segregation

Beginning in the 1980s, Asian women from India, Sri Lanka, Philippine and Nepal started to migrate to Kuwait to work in domestic service. This change in demography (from Arab domestic servants to Asians) brought new kinds of struggles between employer and employee that was translated into spatial changes in the domestic area. The most important feature was that the female domestics’ spaces were included in the family inner space. The third floor was transformed to the
production space of the house to include the female workers’ rooms, their bathroom, laundry room and ironing room (Figure 9.).

Contrary to the female workers’ spaces, male workers’ rooms were pushed further away from the family space. In particular, they moved from the backyard of the house to the front of the house. The male workers’ room was detached from the service group; thus, it was like a separate entity with an exterior existence. The layout of the male worker’s room suggests that this worker was untrusted or feared, as he was assigned a room with no optional access to the family area. The changes in both male and female workers’ rooms and their segregation, can be justified in many ways. First, the increasing number of sexual relationships between female and male labours outside of wedlock (a culturally unacceptable phenomenon in Kuwait) that urged their segregation. Second, the decrease in the plot area of land offered by the government to citizens from 750-1000 square meters (8,070-10,760 square feet) to 400-500 square meters (4,304-5,380 square feet), which gave little extra space for a backyard or a separate exterior production area. This moved the production areas of the laundry room, ironing room and female domestic worker space to the third floor of the house, allowing the movement of female workers to be closely monitored by the employer. With all these changes to female workers’ spaces, they never left the service group of spaces. Third, the Islamic revival sahwa aldenya that touched the Middle East in the 1980s could be another reason that encouraged gender segregation. In the 1980s, many Islamic activists raised the issue of gender segregation in schools and clubs. Many scholars have written about this Islamic revival in Kuwait “revivalists mainly aimed to restore a moral order, that is to fight alcohol, drug
abuse and zina.\textsuperscript{68} They pressed the government to ban nightclubs and to impose stricter segregation between the sexes in public places.\textsuperscript{69}

As in NHA first housing plan, female domestic workers’ rooms were 2 doors away from male drivers’ rooms. On the other hand, in the eighties housing plan the two rooms are 44 steps and three doors away from each other.

\textbf{Inseparable spaces of work and home}

Because domestic servants work and live in their employer’s house, the distinction between the workplace and home life is undistinguishable. They never go to work, but rather wake up to it. This makes their free time vulnerable and their working hours extendable depending on their employer’s demands.\textsuperscript{70} Since the 1990s, the experience for male and female servants has differed based on the locations of their private rooms.

The exterior location of the male servant’s room gave it certain characteristics and privileges. It was less connected to the house, making the time defining the beginning and end of male servants’ duties more respected and visible to the employer, compared with female domestic workers who resided in the same house (especially since the 1990s) as the family and who could easily be called on at any time for chores. Their private time was thus easily interrupted because of the close proximity to their employers.

\textsuperscript{68} zina: adultery.
Isolation

Domestic work is concealed behind the walls of the private spaces of employers’ houses, making domestic workers face loneliness and isolation from the world outside. By embracing their rooms in employers’ houses, female servants were even more isolated socially; they were neither able to invite friends to the employer’s house nor to meet friends outside the house. Few female domestic servants in Kuwait enjoyed their weekly free day outside the house because of their employer’s restrictions. The increasing police reports of female domestic servants being sexually abused in Kuwait City by other male foreign workers made many employers more conscious about protecting their employees, forbidding them from leaving the premises. Another reason for the restrictions could be the employers’ distrust of where the domestic female servant would spend her free time: “most Kuwaitis give the worker a holiday, but with the family. These days off cause problems inside the house.... the big problem is the outside relationships. Sometimes they have bad friendships.”\(^{71}\) Other families worried about domestic workers removing items from the house or bringing unwanted items into the house.\(^{72}\)

Male domestic workers’ exterior rooms and the exterior types of jobs assigned to them make it easier to exit the social isolation of their employer’s house to socialize and mingle with other workers in the neighborhood as stated earlier. In every neighborhood, there is a spot for male

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workers to gather. By contrast, female workers were isolated and their social life with other female
labours was limited to when their employer was absent from the house (mornings and part of the
afternoons usually) or in the weekly gathering of the family when the mistresses were accompanied
by their servants and nannies. The different treatments of both male and female workers’ spaces,
exhibits the larger cultural values that categorize the outside world as the male sphere and the
domestic interiors as the female sphere, rather than being a response to the organization of the
workers’ spaces within the house.

Servants social life before 1990s

Interestingly, before 1990s the social lives of female and male labourers used to be carried out through the fences between houses or the side doors, where they could gather and chat when the employer was absent or asleep. From the 1990s onward, female workers are mainly housed on the third floor, socializing with close neighbors and in some cases crossing from one house to another along the flat roofs. The roofs of the 400 square meter Kuwaiti houses are now associated with the existence of female domestic worker’s gatherings.

‘Intimate Stranger’ vs. ‘Domestic Enemy’

As stated earlier, over the past 40 years, female domestic workers’ spaces have gradually become closer to the family’s private spaces, making these workers ‘the intimate strangers’. Contrary to its intimate image, operating within the family’s space is stressful and restraining for female domestic labours. Despite living close by, they can never enjoy the intimacy of the family. Indeed, they are not allowed to use the family’s spaces in the house or enjoy an independent space of their own. The social barriers between employers and workers include class, race, culture and linguistic barriers, which all prevent intimacy between these groups.

The disassociation of male workers’ spaces from the family house could also lead them to be categorized as ‘domestic enemies’. All houses in Kuwait are required by the municipality to have a fence around them. Since the 1990s, male servants’ rooms have been fenced off from the family house. However, this estrangement can be a benefit. For example, male servants can invite male friends to their rooms since it is not part of the family space. And they presumably have much greater mobility than their female counterparts.

**Other cases**

In the case of a single male employer, hiring a male domestic servant would be the likely option. The male domestic worker would handle the housework as well as driving for the master. When comparing this situation with the living conditions of a female domestic worker with a single female employer, one can see a vast difference in the level of freedom that the male worker would have enjoyed compared with the female worker. Another important aspect is the social life that the

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75 By inviting male friends, the Kuwaiti mistress or her daughters would not be seen by male guests. Male servants can thus enjoy their social activities without disturbing the family’s privacy.
male worker would enjoy with other workers in the local neighborhood, while the female servant has no outlets for socializing outside the house. Humoud Abdulaziz, a retired single Kuwaiti, explained that “having a male domestic servant is more convenient for me, especially that most of my guests are men. He is my chauffeur, servant, and gardener. No female servant can do what he does.”.

**Relation between female and male domestic workers**

Most male domestic servants feel superiority over female servants in the house. This is driven by the power given to them by their employer to discipline the maids if they misbehave. Moreover, they are typically the more unrestricted partner at work. Male domestic workers have access to a car and can help their female counterparts to run errands such as sending mail, shipping boxes, getting their shopping and driving her on her day off. The female servants’ compensation would be in the amounts and kinds of food she prepares for the male servant since she is responsible to prepare his meals. Sekhar Katur is an Indian driver in Kuwait, he explains his relationship to the female Indian servants of the same employer, “They bargain with me in food variety they offer to me. Even when I complain to my madam, things would get better for a week or two”.

Gender and Wages

The wage system mandated by the Kuwaiti government does not consider gender, that is women and men are treated as being the same. However, this differs for other factors such as occupation and level of education. On the contrary, for domestic workers, men and women are not considered to be the same, even if they are hired for the same job. Indeed, male domestic servants are paid on average 40% more compared with females.\(^{76}\)

Minimum wages for domestic servants are set by the government in a special index, but a minimum wage is also set by each government for it’s citizens working abroad. The highest minimum wage set by a foreign country in Kuwait is by the Philippines, making their citizens the highest paid domestic workers in Kuwait in general.\(^{77}\)

Women who migrate without their husbands

The case of women who become migrated domestic workers because of their relationships with her overseas family or husband is a different story. Domestic service offers a secure space in which the migrated worker can live, a high salary compared with the origin country and an opportunity to leave the patriarchal power of their parents or husbands,\(^{78}\) all this changes their relations with their relatives. The job offering a social and economic lift can consequently enhance

\(^{78}\) Momsen, Janet Henshall. *Gender, Migration and Domestic Service*. (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 109
their family’s wellbeing and improve their children’s education because of the remittances they send. The economic and social independence facilitated by their job makes them challenge the dominant gender role constraints and patriarchy system that might have been the reason they left their home country in the first place. This is the case for many Indian, Sri Lankan, Nepali and Ethiopian women who come from rural areas where women’s mobility is controlled and their separation from their male guardian is denied.

In addition to providing women servants with financial independence and social mobility, domestic work empowers them to transcend the marriage obligation encouraged by their family that is the cultural norm in many rural areas. Leaving home before marriage gives them the power to negotiate their own marital status by granting them a social distance that can empower them to express their will to get married and leave their job or not.

The Indian servants were influenced by the architecture in Kuwait; in fact, when returning home, they would do major changes to their houses to mimic some Gulf architecture features.

“Laurie Baker, an English architect domiciled in India and an admirer of indigenous architecture of the Orient, has observed that in Kerela houses are no longer built in the traditional way. The beautiful houses built with local natural materials which were functionally the ideal for Kerala climate conditions are yielding to reinforced concrete,...” Baker attributes this change mostly to the naivete of new rich Gulf expatriates”

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Conclusion

Home, the refuge

The home is seen as a safe haven and a refuge from public tension. However, for generations, the private spaces of Kuwaiti homes were interrupted by the constant presence of foreign servants. With their existence, the home became an organization with rules, discipline and surveillance. The distinction between employer and employee is inscribed in the space. In early examples of Kuwaiti houses in the 1960s, the “otherization” of servants was visible spatially through the existence of separate buildings for employers and employees. The “us” domestic space was centered and dominating, while the “them” space was marginalized and surveyed. Architecture was thus a tool in the categorization and racialization of the servant population. The privacy of the family was maintained by physical barriers that took the form of doors, windows, stairs, long passages and walls.

However, the physical barriers of 1960s houses were transformed into social boundaries in later examples. In 1990s houses, domestic servants’ spaces were embraced by the family house; however, social inequality remained, proving that the contrasting ideas of physical intimacy and social distancing can exist in one place. By contrast, social barriers draw lines between groups of people and can be mental, unwritten rules or physical ones. By looking at the several examples presented in this study, one can see how certain mental barriers were transformed into physical ones over time.

In the latest predominant house type in Kuwait, female domestic servants’ rooms are located on the third floor; hence, the third floor has become a social hub for female servants to
socialize over the roof parapets. While the social life of employers is active on the ground level in their salons, the two separate social groups live together but never mix.

**Space mechanism**

The nature and uses of the house spaces are never fixed, but always in a static mechanism. The social mapping of a certain space can change completely if you add one person to it. This leads to many social maps of the same space by changing the time and people in it. As Ardener stated: “Anyone who has played chess will know, objects are affected by the place in space of other objects; not only their presence, and their position, but even their absence, or ‘negative presence’, may be important”

81. This leads us to a clear picture of the maids working in the house in the daytime, moving in a specific order from one room to another. When the family are back from work and school, the maids are not welcome in the rooms or family spaces. When guests are in the house, maids are not permitted to enter except when serving food. The visibility of domestic workers is controlled and they exist in the house through different timings and occasions.

Societies generated their own rules in their homes, thereby dividing the physical real world into different social spheres that existed only when those particular bodies entered the space. These rules created territories, drew boundaries and built walls and constructed passages between the two separate worlds. Such a practice reminds us of the Kuwaiti example discussed earlier, where the house rules codified the space, classified groups of bodies into different categories and assigned each group with specific three-dimensional spaces within the house.
Architecture played no part of this production; rather, it was simply a tool with which to create “the theatre of action”\textsuperscript{82} that separated the two social spheres and restrained the mobility of users.

**Implications of the study**

This study shed light on the spatial conditions of domestic workers in Kuwaiti houses to serve as a base for organizational studies and policymakers in Kuwait. The space allocated to migrant domestic workers is simply their ‘home’ away from home, which needs to fulfill a basic level of human needs. In this document, those needs are not discussed, leaving it for professional scholars or organizations to set the spatial criteria. Through writing this thesis and doing fieldwork, I have witnessed many domestic worker rooms, ranging from a private room for every worker (in some wealthy families) to five workers in one 215 square feet room.\textsuperscript{83} The characteristics of the worker’s room cannot be fully under the employer’s discretion; rather, there must be basic state policies governing the employer’s design for domestic worker spaces.

\textsuperscript{82} Rendell, Jane. *Gender, Space, Architecture: An Interdisciplinary Introduction*. (London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 113
\textsuperscript{83} In a wealthy family house with five domestic workers serving six Kuwaitis, which indicates the household’s income level.
One note from the case studies presented in this study is the state designs of single domestic workers’ rooms in every house, while the Ministry of Planning study (1983) found an average of 2.2 domestic workers in every Kuwaiti family house. The state designs of house prototypes suggested two or more workers in one room. The same study presented statistics on the kinds of problems suffered by domestic workers, notably workers’ disagreements and the lack of
harmonious relations among them owing to differences in their race, culture, language and religion, or simply their inability to get along while sharing a workplace and ‘home’. This fact makes the problems with the employer just one part of the situation, since they have to deal with sharing a room with one or more co-workers. State-built houses have to include more than a room for domestic workers since the average number of such workers per Kuwaiti family is rising.

This study showed the evolution of domestic workers’ rooms within the employer’s house in both state-built house designs and employer house designs, trying to raise awareness for governmental authorities (municipality policymakers and the Ministry of the Interior) to get involved in studies that help set the criteria for domestic workers’ rooms in employers’ houses. For example, such criteria might state the level of privacy needed for domestic workers.

**Future studies**

Through writing this dissertation, I noted a lack of studies documenting the progression of Kuwaiti houses over time. It was also difficult to gather state-built house prototypes plans. Scholarly work is needed to bridge this gap. Another gap was noted in gender studies of Kuwaiti houses’ spaces.
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