

**Islamic Development and Islamist Politics:
The Revival of *Awqaf* in Kuwait**

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Abstract

In the 1990's a new movement emerged seeking to promote Islamic development through the revival of the traditional Islamic institution of religious endowments, or *waqf* (pl. *awqaf*). The theoreticians behind this "new *awqaf* movement" saw its renewal in ambitious terms as a means to re-invigorate civil society through a revitalization of Islamic norms and institutions, recapturing the initiative for social development from the state. This paper chronicles the rapid rise and then restriction of this "new *awqaf* movement" through one of its most dynamic animators, the Kuwait *Awqaf* Public Foundation (KAPF). In analyzing the denouement of the KAPF, I demonstrate how the promotion of an Islamic framework for development earned the "new *awqaf* movement" political enemies: liberals unnerved by this new venue for expanding Islamist activism, and Salafi Islamists opposed to these innovations championed by the more modernist Muslim Brotherhood. In the end these sociopolitical divisions invited the mediation of the ruling family-controlled government which severely curtailed the experiment in Islamic development. Ultimately, then, the tale of the KAPF illustrates the challenge of third sector development in ideologically polarized societies, and underscores the enduring primacy of the rentier state.

Introduction

In the 1990's the small wealthy Gulf emirate of Kuwait became a key animator of a program of "Islamic development" centered on the revival of the traditional Islamic institution of religious endowments, or *waqf* (pl. *awqaf*). The conceptual development and practical implementation of this program was spearheaded by a new institution, the Kuwait *Awqaf* Public Foundation (KAPF), which was established under the Ministry of *Awqaf* and Religious Affairs in 1993. The theoreticians behind this project of Islamic development saw the *waqf* as an important social component of the emerging Islamic economy. Islamic endowments were to be the central vehicle for realizing a broad developmental program rooted in civil society and steeped in Islamic norms. Their approach was innovative and their goals ambitious in the context of a rentier economy like Kuwait, where generous social subsidies are provided by the state. The KAPF represented an attempt to restore that social initiative back to the community.

Over the next decade the quasi-governmental KAPF became a dynamic nexus for philanthropy and social action. It successfully presided over a proliferation of new foundational vehicles and a dramatic expansion in *waqf* donations. The more traditional concerns of mosque preservation and quranic recitation long favored by the conservative Ministry were expanded to include the promotion of volunteerism and issues of social development. Moreover, the influence of this "new *awqaf* movement" was felt both in Kuwait and beyond through KAPF's designation as the coordinating state for *awqaf* at the pan-Islamic level by the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC).

The experience of the KAPF, then, denotes a striking case of successful Islamist mobilization, where state resources were utilized to promote Islamic activism. Yet within a decade of impressive expansion, this experiment in Islamic development was dramatically curtailed. Liberals, critical of the presence of Muslim Brotherhood activists in the Foundation and unnerved by the expansion in their activities charged the KAPF of running a "state within a state." Their ire was matched by Salafi traditionalists who likewise resented the advancement of their Islamist rivals, and staunchly opposed the innovation introduced within the ministry on religious grounds. Ultimately the Emir personally intervened to stop the new project, the pro-Brotherhood *Awqaf* minister was replaced, and the activities of the KAPF were scaled back.

Moving forward I will provide context for this case study of the rise and fall of the “new *awqaf* movement” in Kuwait which is based on interviews with KAPF officials, politicians, and social critics. I will discuss the evolution of *waqf* in Islamic societies and its treatment in the academic literature. I will then turn to a study of the KAPF: its founding, its goals, and its activities. After establishing the central importance of social activism in the KAPF program through a presentation of a key vehicle, The *Waqf* Fund Network for Community Development (WFCND), I will turn to the contentious politics surrounding the KAPF. I will then end with a reflection on what the denouement of the KAPF tells us about Islamist activism in petrowelfare states like Kuwait.

Waqf in Islamic societies and in the academic literature

The *waqf*, or Islamic endowment, is widely acknowledged in the literature as a key institution of Islamic civilization.¹ Whether held in state as religious properties, through philanthropic foundations, or as family trusts, *waqf* has played a central role in the public and economic life of Muslim societies. The term *waqf*, which literally means “stop,” denotes a trust by which a property owner would dedicate the property to God, and designate its income stream (rents, taxes) to a beneficiary in perpetuity. Historically in Islamic societies, then, the *waqf* was used to provide for a variety of public works - mosques, religious schools, hospitals, public baths - which were sustained by way of revenues from buildings or plots of land donated for this purpose. Later the practice of declaring property as *waqf* gained currency among prominent personages as a means to prevent the seizure of wealth by the state upon their death. By declaring the property *waqf* and descendants as trustees, one could secure part of the fortune for one’s surviving family, and protect it from taxation. Family *waqf* were also used to prevent fragmentation of property, to incorporate families, or to customize social welfare provisions for

¹ Important recent publications on the evolution of the *waqf* include Timur Kuran, *The Long Divergence: How Islamic Law Held Back the Middle East* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011) and Pascale Ghazaleh, ed., *Held in Trust: Waqf in the Islamic World* (Cairo: AUC Press, 2011). John Robert Barnes, *An Introduction to Religious Foundations in the Ottoman Empire* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986) provides an introduction to the functioning of *waqf* in the Ottoman empire.

descendants.² Over time, through this mix of private interests and public charity, the *waqf* evolved into a broad social system of religious support and social services independent of the state.

However, in the modern era of nation states, the significance and independence of *waqf* has been eroded.³ Beginning in the 19th century, expanded property rights that protected owners from arbitrary expropriations, as well as new means of holding and accumulating wealth such as banks accounts and publicly traded companies contributed to the decline in the number of new *waqf*.⁴ The elimination of *waqf* proceeded apace with the process of state formation, as central authorities sought to mobilize resources through their seizure and to provide public services on a national scale. Private *waqf* were abolished in the socialist period in Egypt and elsewhere in a move to decapitate the elite and appropriate land for redistribution. Public *waqf* were taken by the state and turned over to newly created state Ministries of *Awqaf* charged with supporting the public economy. Eventually the responsibilities of Ministries of *Awqaf* across the Muslim world largely were restricted to religious affairs such as the management of mosques and assignment of religious officials. Reduced to a bureaucratic adjunct of the state, the *waqf* lost much of its charitable origins and social relevance.

The literature provides many diverse views of this long history as should be expected for an institution that has touched on all aspects – the social, the economic, and the political – across the Arab and Muslim world. The economist Timur Kuran has highlighted constraints the existence of this once very successful economic institution placed on economic growth within Islamic societies as Western countries turned to corporations and municipal institutions which

² Beshara Doumani, “Endowing Family: *Waqf*, Property Devolution, and Gender in Greater Syria, 1800-1860,” *Comparative Studies in History and Society* 40, 1, pp 3–41.

³ On the seizure of *waqf* in the Ottoman Empire see Murat Cizakca, *A History of Philanthropic Foundations: The Islamic World from the Seventh Century to the Present* (Istanbul: Boğaziçi University Press, 2000); in Egypt see Gabriel Baer, *A History of Landownership in Modern Egypt, 1800-1950* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962); and Daniela Pioppi, “Privatization of Social Services as Regime Strategy: the Revival of Islamic Endowments (*Awqaf*) in Egypt,” in Oliver Schlumberger, *Debating Arab Authoritarianism: Dynamics and Durability in Nondemocratic Regimes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007).

⁴ Timur Kuran, “Institutional Roots of Authoritarian Rule in the Middle East: Political Legacies of the Islamic *Waqf*,” unpublished paper.

were more capable of aggregating capital and providing services on a grand scale.⁵ Historians have tended to stress the creative uses of *waqf* within its legal constraints, and have mined its practices to learn more about the web of social relations they constituted.⁶

By studying a case of the contemporary revival of this institution, I am able to show how some Muslims have reflexively drawn upon this history. This “new *awqaf* movement” has – implicitly, if not explicitly - acknowledged the limitations of the traditional Islamic trust, reworking its presentation and management through a syncretic melding with the practices of Western foundations and linkage with the growing marketplace in Islamic finance. At the same time, they have “reified” its revival as a restoration of a key component of the emerging Islamic economy, one able to recapture social dynamism from the clutches of an overbearing state. And indeed this institutional revival provided a new field for Islamist social activism and in some cases political mobilization within the newly created fund initiatives.

The revival of Awqaf: The creation of the Kuwait Awqaf Public Foundation (KAPF)

The development of the *waqf* in Kuwait closely parallels this general history of increasing state control.⁷ The practice of Islamic endowments predates the modern state of Kuwait by centuries; historians refer to the first documented *waqf* of Ibn Bahar Mosque established in 1695. In the pre-state era endowments were private and emerged voluntarily from wealthy merchants in the community. Reputable religious figures were used to issue *waqf* deeds and to assign their executor or *nazir*.⁸ *Waqf* contributions were not restricted to mosques, but were used to extend help to the poor and needy, to support Islamic centers, to organize medical

⁵ Kuran (2011, 2013)

⁶ Ghazaleh (2011), Doumani (1998)

⁷ This account of the development of *awqaf* in Kuwait is compiled from a number of sources: Abdul Mohsen M. Ali Othman and Dahi Al Fadhli, “Role of Kuwait *Awqaf* Public Foundation in Promoting *Awqaf*,” in Syed Khalid Rashid, ed., *Awqaf Experiences in South Asia* (New Dehli: Institute of Objective Studies, 2002): 249-262; Abdallah Tarak, Kuwait *Awqaf* Public Foundation: the experience and its perspectives,” *Awqaf*, Vol. 5, Year 3, October 2003, pp. 37-50; and the website of the Kuwait *Awqaf* Public Foundation (<http://www.awqaf.org/>); accessed March 2014.

⁸ In Kuwait, *waqf* deeds became closely associated with one such judge, Sheikh Abdullah al-Adsani, to the degree that *waqf* deeds in the emirate came to be known by the name “adsaniyat.” “Kuwait *Awqaf* Public Foundation’s Experience,” Working paper, Department of Studies and External Relations, Kuwait *Awqaf* Public Foundation (May 2008): 6.

care, and to provide help for students through scholarships and the publication and distribution of books. The emirate witnessed a melding of this traditional Islamic form and modern institutions in the early part of the 20th century. The first modern school in Kuwait was established through a *waqf* in 1911, as was the first Arab charitable society in 1913.⁹ A community representative for both orphans and *awqaf* was appointed informally in 1921. Kuwaiti *waqf* contributions extended beyond the emirate to Mecca, Al-Ahsa'a in the eastern provinces of Saudi Arabia, to Bahrain, and to India.

With the advent of oil and independence, the relationship of *waqf* to government in Kuwait began to change. A government agency was established in 1949 and the legal framework for *waqf* was set through an Emiri Decree in 1951.¹⁰ With the declaration of independence, the Department of *Awqaf* was converted into a government Ministry in 1962. In 1965 the title of the ministry was expanded to “The Ministry of *Awqaf* and Islamic Affairs,” and the ministry began to play a role similar to those across the Arab world: managing the state affairs of mosques and imams, while maintaining a small portfolio of *waqf* properties. During this time, the huge influx of oil revenues into the state budget meant that the state began taking a dominant role in development. Accordingly, the private and communitarian quality the *waqf* was lost.¹¹

Two trends provided an opening to recapture the voluntarist nature of *waqf* in Kuwait in the 1990's: the weakening of state finances and the maturing of Islamic finance.¹² The dominance of the state in development affairs in Kuwait was weakened over the 1980's and 1990's due to two factors. First, low oil prices in the 1980 brought the state's first budget deficits, leading the government to look for vehicles to reduce the total reliance of citizens on the state. Second, the 1990 Gulf War and Iraq occupation further shook state finances, resulting in intensified talk about the need for privatization, and to include the private sector and civil society

⁹ Badr Nasser al-Mutairi, “The Story of the Development of *Awqaf* in Kuwait,” (Arabic) as presented to conference on *Waqf* and Globalization, Kuwait, April 2008.

¹⁰ That same law remained in force without alteration for over fifty years until the establishment of the KAPF.

¹¹ Tarak, p. 30.

¹² For another case study of the revival of *waqf* under conditions of government austerity see Pioppa (2007).

in the development of society.¹³ KAPF emerged in this period when the destruction of Kuwaiti infrastructure necessitated huge investments for reconstruction.

These structural changes coincided with political ones. Following the liberation of Kuwait from Iraqi occupation in 1991, the emirate experienced an Islamic resurgence in the social, economic, and political spheres. This long developing trend was confirmed by the results of the first two elections for the National Assembly following its re-instatement upon Kuwait's liberation. Islamist movements from both the Muslim Brotherhood and Salafist tendencies did very well, eclipsing the liberal-nationalists who had previously led the opposition.¹⁴ This rising political power was used to advance a program of Islamization in public life, epitomized by the establishment of a new committee to study the application of Shariah law. Over the next decade the Islamists in parliament focused on public morality through legislation to promote gender segregation in education and restrictions of public celebrations. They also pushed for broader changes in the economy including the passage of a zakat tax and a new Islamic banking law.¹⁵ The popularity of Islamic finance in Kuwait – epitomized by the success of the Kuwait Finance House (KFH) – offered critical support for the revival of the *waqf*.

These trends came together in the creation in 1993 of the Kuwait *Awqaf* Public Foundation (KAPF) which was established through an emiri decree as a semi-autonomous institution. Salaries and other operational costs were paid by the government, but the KAPF accepted properties and funds from private contributors which it managed with the assistance of the burgeoning private Islamic financial sector. Relationships forged in this Islamic subeconomy – among Islamic banks, Islamic charities, and the Islamic foundations - became mutually reinforcing.¹⁶ On the one hand, Kuwait's Islamic benevolent sector gained both technical

¹³ Ibid, 30-31.

¹⁴ Kristin Smith, "Divided Government in Kuwait: The Politics of Parliament since the Gulf War," Vol. 8, 1 (Summer 1999): 1-18.

¹⁵ There were actually divisions amongst political Islamists over the passage of the Islamic banking law which opened up the sector to a broader Islamic market, but ended the monopoly of the dominant Kuwait Finance House. For more on the politics of Islamic finance in Kuwait see Kristin Smith Diwan, "Kuwait Finance House and the Islamization of Public Life in Kuwait," in Clement H. Moore and Rodney Wilson, eds., *The Politics of Islamic Finance* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004): 168-190.

¹⁶ For an early discussion of the dynamics of the Islamic subeconomy see Timur Kuran, "Islamic Economics and the Islamic Subeconomy," *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, 9 (Fall 1995): 155-

support and an invigorated mission from the rise of Islamic finance. On the other hand, as Islamic institutions committed to upholding Islamic law, both Islamic charities and Islamic foundations deal exclusively with Islamic financial institutions. As Kuwait's largest Islamic bank, KFH has become a hub for the financial activities of these groups which hold over 100 accounts there – a sizable portfolio for the bank.¹⁷ Newspapers are full of advertisements asking that people deposit contributions to charities or *awqaf* funds directly to accounts held at KFH. In turn, KFH's direct contributions to the Islamic NGO and quasi-state foundation sector are substantial.¹⁸

Through the KAPF there was a concerted effort to increase the relevance and broaden the role of the *waqf* in Kuwaiti society. The strategic objectives of KAPF, published in 1997, emphasized three goals: 1) to effectively manage *waqf* funds, 2) to strive for the creation of new *awqaf*, and 3) to produce within KAPF's institutional structure a developmental framework directed toward the betterment and prosperity of the society.¹⁹

The effective management of waqf resources

The initial goal – to more effectively manage *waqf* funds – required addressing the limitations resulting from the composition of *waqf* assets. Traditionally, Islamic endowments have been made primarily in the form of land and property, and this held true in Kuwait as well. However, the growth and maturation of the Islamic financial industry opened up many new opportunities for investing Islamically. The first step in more effective management of *waqf* resources then was to distinguish between its fixed and monetary assets. Fixed assets – real estate and other properties – were turned over to a real estate management firm to improve their performance. Once improvement was made in fixed assets the KAPF turned to monetary assets. It was here where access to new investment vehicles in the Islamic marketplace could make a

173; Armando Salvatore, "The Genesis and Evolution of 'Islamic Publicness' under Global Constraints." *Journal of Arabic, Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies* 3, no. 1 (1996): 51-70.

¹⁷ *Al-Talia*, 18 May 1994, p. 6. In 1999 the KAPF was managing approximately \$400 million, a third of it placed in the financial sector (presumably KFH). Interview with Khaled Al-Hajiri, Deputy Secretary General for Investment, KAPF, Kuwait, December 1999.

¹⁸ KFH Annual Report, 2005. KFH own corporate *zakat* contributions in 2005 amounted to more than \$3 million US paid directly to *Zakat House*. KFH *zakat* contributions are calculated on 2.577% on the reserves of the parent company.

¹⁹ Othman and Fadhli, p. 251.

significant difference in returns. KAPF officials worked to invest in a diversified portfolio of moderate risk. These changes in financial management resulted in a modest improvement in capital assets.

The creation of new waqf projects and funds

To take full advantage of the new Islamic markets, KAPF needed to shift the composition of *waqf* from in kind to monetary donations. To accomplish this, the KAPF had to get individuals and companies thinking about *waqf* differently. Indeed, the KAPF soon gave its benefactors reason to see endowments in a new light through a complete reorganization of its charitable activities. Many of these ideas were garnered through visits to the U.K. and other Western countries, where the best practices of foundations were studied.²⁰ This led the KAPF to initiate two new vehicles for soliciting *waqf* contributions: projects and funds.

Projects were solicited from benefactors and thus were established outside of the KAPF budget. The benefactors were then placed on the board of the new project, giving them a means to supervise its progress.²¹ One of the earliest projects was launched soon after the KAPF was established to address the problem of autism in Kuwait. More than 50,000 KD were raised to launch this center. KAPF also catered to traditionalists through the establishment of a media center retracing the life of the prophet Mohammed. Later the KAPF expanded projects from more bricks-and-mortar enterprises to more conceptual ones. In 2006 the *Waqf al-Waqt* was created to promote the idea of volunteerism across the Gulf and to train young volunteers.

At the heart of KAPF's new social agenda, however, were its new funds which it initiated in 1994. Directed to particular social causes, the funds provided the KAPF with a set of existing programs that could be promoted to potential *waqif* or "donors" who they encouraged to make monthly contributions to the *waqf*.²² This not only allowed for more targeted marketing of *waqf* – illustrated in glossy brochures for each fund – it also allowed for a broad expansion of the meaning of *waqf*. For while some funds preserved the traditional *awqaf* philanthropy, such as the preservation of mosques and investment in Quranic sciences, others were specifically designed to expand the socioeconomic role played by *awqaf*. Among the funds created in the

²⁰ Interview with al-Hajeri (1999).

²¹ Interview with Khaled al-Bisharah, Director of *Waqf al-Waqt*, KAPF, Kuwait, June 2008.

²² Interview with Kawakib Melhem, Research department, KAPF, Kuwait, June 2008.

early years of KAPF were funds for culture and thought, for health development, environmental preservation, and educational development.

The differentiation of projects and funds served not only to extend the reach of Islamic philanthropy but also to provide a way to reach out to citizens and encourage them to once again entrust donations to the *waqf*. This was accomplished through a broad public outreach program to form a positive perception of *waqf* and KAPF, and to expand the network of potential contributors.²³ Marketing campaigns were instituted using many different media including television, radio, advertisements in public places such as buses. Religious outlets received particular attention, as the call for *waqf* was extended through Friday sermons, advertisements within mosques, and fund raising during special religious occasions. Outreach was also coordinated with government ministries and their affiliated charitable arms such as the government-run Beit al-Zakat. There was also a conscious effort to identify potential contributors (*waqifs*), and to cultivate a positive experience for current ones through personal visits, gathering information about their attitudes towards *waqf* and its spending channels, extending assistance, and recognizing their contributions systematically.²⁴ Positive relationships were promoted with non-governmental organizations (NGO's), to encourage collaboration, shun unfair competition, and to urge them to form their own endowments.

These innovations and marketing efforts resulted in dramatic increases in *waqf* donations. At the time of the creation of the KAPF the Kuwait Ministry of *Awqaf* was managing a negligible portfolio of only four *awqaf*. After the first five years of operation the number had climbed to 220.²⁵ This increase continued over the following five years which saw an additional 330 *waqf* established. This expansion represented not only a shift in quantity but also in kind. In 1993 the majority of individuals were still contributing real estate to the *waqf*. With the creation of the projects and funds this began to change. Statistics from 2002 show that while 55% of *waqf* assets remained in real estate, 40% were now financial.²⁶ The move from narrowly defined religious causes to more social investments also increased substantially, as the total share of *waqf*

²³“Kuwait *Awqaf* Public Foundation’s Experience,” Working paper, Department of Studies and External Relations, Kuwait *Awqaf* Public Foundation (May 2008): 6.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Mutairi, p. 17.

²⁶ The vast majority of assets (87%) are located in Kuwait. p.8

investment in the areas of social services and education increased from 7.6% in 1995 to 23.2% in 2002.²⁷

This expansion in the social engagement and relevance of the modern *waqf* was the key concern of the “new *awqaf* movement.” Its execution through the KAPF was the brainchild of the Minister of *Awqaf* at the time, Dr. Ali Fahd al-Zumai, who had a history of Islamic activism and innovation to draw upon in setting out this new vehicle for Islamic development.

The creation of a new developmental framework

Ali Fahd al-Zumai was a former member of the Muslim Brotherhood where he played a role in political mobilization for the group. In his new role as Minister of *Awqaf* and Islamic Affairs he was determined to apply the skills he had gained in Islamic mobilization and institution building toward the goal of social development. Al-Zumai believed that throughout history the *waqf* was the primary framework to locate voluntary activities between the government and family; in other words, *waqf* was the key animator of civil society in Islam. For him, the revival of *awqaf* offered the best structure for strengthening the social bonds between the different sects and classes of Muslim society, to animate them toward voluntary action, and to provide social insurance.²⁸

Al-Zumai viewed the key impediment to this revival in social forces opposed to these changes. As a long time employee in the Ministry of *Awqaf*, al-Zumai was intimately familiar with the traditionalism at the heart of the ministry which he argued, “left prevailing Islamic trends debating issues of *fiqh* amongst themselves, while most citizens are looking for opportunities for positive engagement.”²⁹ When given the opportunity to lead the Ministry he carefully planned the structure of the KAPF and its funds to insulate it from these forces. He ensured that the legal basis of KAPF was independent from the Ministry by its authorization through an emiri decree. He also sought to physically separate the KAPF, setting up its own

²⁷ Tarak, p. 36.

²⁸ Ali Fahd al-Zumai, “*Waqf* and the activation of social forces (Kuwait’s experience),” talk given to the First International Conference for the *al-Waqf* journal, April 13-15, 2008. See also, al-Mutairi, p. 13.

²⁹ Al-Mutairi, p. 12.

building far from the Ministry of *Awqaf* building.³⁰

This goal of social inclusion was intentionally fostered through the governing structure for the funds. Each of these funds had its own mission and plan for investment. Their administration was run through an appointed board headed by a director. KAPF was very deliberate in organizing these boards so as to draw in both expertise and, importantly, to mobilize broad support across society.³¹ There was a deliberate intention to balance different political and societal trends; to bring together both Islamists and non-Islamists, merchant and labor, and to keep government engaged through the employment of ex-ministers.

The new *awqaf* movement succeeded in attracting a coterie of enthusiastic young employees with a genuine sense of mission. According to a manager, “Many were motivated to work 16-18 hours a day to get the funds started and to promote them. In those early days it seemed like KAPF activities were everywhere!”³² The experiment of KAPF also garnered attention across the Muslim world. The success of KAPF in revitalizing the traditional practice of Islamic endowments was recognized in 1997, as Kuwait was designated by a meeting of *Awqaf* Ministers as the coordinator for *awqaf* activities for all Muslim countries. This expanded the reach of KAPF which sought to further augment its knowledge base and capacity for innovation by sponsoring academic conferences, international writing competitions, and a refereed journal on the subject of Islamic endowments, *Awqaf*.

Still, success did not prevent the KAPF from political challenges. Indeed, one of the finest exemplars of its activist mission offered a Trojan horse for the very Islamic movements it claimed as detrimental to its program.

Political Mobilization through The Waqf Fund Network for Community Development

The *Waqf* Fund Network for Community Development (hereafter WFNCD) was established at the apex of the new experimentation in social activism. The fund was conceived as an organizational vehicle for bringing *waqf* activism right into local communities. To position the work of the WFNCD, its framers worked to re-conceptualize the idea of development,

³⁰ Interview with al-Bisharah (2008).

³¹ Ali Fahd al-Zumai (2008); interview with al-Bisharah (2008).

³² Interview with al-Bisharah (2008).

placing it within an Islamic framework:

We find that the objectives of development are to induce an overall cultural development through a balanced interaction between the social, religious and economic factors...It is our duty to bring to focus some of the Islamic values and concepts which were overlooked by our modern life style, especially those associated with development.³³

The WFNCD supplemented its own funds with those of other private and governmental organizations, with the goal of putting the *waqf* formula to work within the residential areas of Kuwait. It self consciously emphasized “local” solutions over solutions offered by state authorities on the level of the nation. It also aimed to activate direct community participation, a spirit of communication, and a sense of ownership by local communities, in contrast with the more passive and paternal approach to development that had developed under the petrowelfare state. Finally, the WFNCD emphasized practical Islamic solutions to community problems, establishing moral values in the individual, the family and the private organization.³⁴

The actual uses of the fund were left quite open: “introducing *waqf* funds may involve over a hundred objectives to be realized.”³⁵ Potential services suggested by the WFNCD included 1) services provided at the mosques or schools; 2) health services; 3) scout movements; 4) memorizing and reciting the Quran; 5) cultural, educational or recreational activities; 6) social solidarity projects; 7) environmental projects; 8) parks, youth centers, nurseries, playgrounds, and recreation centers; 9) creativity projects; 10) civil defense services; and 11) family participation projects.

The organization of the fund was hierarchical with the WFNCD serving as the central fund in charge of controlling the national community development and setting its policies. *Waqf* funds were then established belonging to the local governates. And finally, Community Development Committees functioned at the local level, serving as the effective tool for realizing the aims of the community development project. Their duties included establishing a *waqf* for the purpose of community development, defining development projects for the area, and

³³ Brochure from the *Waqf* Fund Network for Community Development (WFNCD), Kuwait *Awqaf* Public Foundation, 1997.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid.

organizing the contribution of citizens to carry them out.

In short, the WFNCD utilized the *waqf* framework to initiate an expansive plan for community development: Islamically inspired, voluntarist in nature, and grounded in the needs of local communities. Although explicitly charged with coordinating with state institutions and bodies, the spirit of the project was essentially grassroots. This amounted to a project of broad social organization, residential area by residential area, with the Islamic *waqf* providing both resources and jobs; and this in what was becoming a very tight job market for Kuwaiti youth in the 1990's.

The politics of Islamic development

Such a broad organizational project, conveying Islamic values, and offering resources and jobs clearly had the potential to be mobilized politically.³⁶ And indeed, one finds that the WFNCD was strongly associated with the Islamic Constitutional Movement (ICM), the Muslim Brotherhood political organization in Kuwait, through one of its employees who later served as political director for the ICM.³⁷ The key to control of the WFNCD projects and funds was to control the local committees. It is here where the ICM exploited the WFNCD by using the committees, particularly in Kuwait's tribal districts, to reward and to strengthen tribal personalities close to the Muslim Brotherhood.³⁸ In this way, the WFNCD became a new forum for Islamist political mobilization.

Once the other political societies got wind of the political implications of this new community organization, they fought to have the program stopped. The suspension of the program was eventually ordered on direct instructions from the Emir. This came within a broader critique of the KAPF which was unleashed by both liberal and Salafi critics. Liberal

³⁶ Research in resource poor states such as Egypt and Palestine has shown how the offering of social services and community organizing by Islamic movements has contributed to the rising popularity and electoral success of the Muslim Brotherhood. See for instance Quintan Wiktorowicz, *Islamic Activism: A Social Movement Theory Approach* (Indiana, 2003).

³⁷ Interview with Nassar al-Khaldi, ICM political director and KAPF employee, December 2007. Mr. al-Khaldi mentioned that he worked with the U.S. embassy who facilitated his study of community organization through churches in the United States.

³⁸ Interviews with al-Bishara, May 2011, al-Khaldi.

activists began a campaign against the KAPF accusing it of running “a state within a state.”³⁹ At the same time, the KAPF faced continuing criticism from traditionalists and Salafi Islamists who were opposed to the modern re-interpretation of the *waqf*, charging the KAPF of “playing with the money of God.”⁴⁰ The Salafis were also concerned about the political opportunism of the ICM.

This initiated what one analyst has called “the period of conservative review and retrenchment.”⁴¹ Traditionalists within the Ministry of *Awqaf* were able to tighten the Shariah supervision over KAPF activities as well as its international conferences and programs. By 2001 the number of KAPF funds – the heart of their social program – had been reduced from 12 to four. That same year the position of Minister of *Awqaf* which had long been held by sympathizers with the more modernist Muslim Brotherhood was turned over to a former Salafi member of parliament. The loss of initiative was felt as parts of the KAPF program, including the fund for mosques which represented a substantial part of the KAPF budget, were transferred back to the main ministry.

Conclusion: The rejoinder of the rentier state

This case study of the rise and fall of the “new *awqaf* movement” in Kuwait speaks to larger issues in both the literature on *waqf* and on authoritarianism in rentier states. First, it illustrates the dynamism of Islamic modernism, particularly in its innovative melding of Western practice with Islamic institutions. Second, it reveals the difficulty of autonomous social development within a rentier economy. While projects of political Islam have flourished in the Arab Gulf, they have remained subject to the management of the monarchies, who may use their control over oil rents to periodically discipline the movements.⁴² While committed to the

³⁹ Interviews with al-Bishara (2008), al-Kawakib (2008).

⁴⁰ Interview with al-Bishara (2008).

⁴¹ Al-Mutairi. pp. 14-15.

⁴² For more studies on government balancing of Islamic movements through extension and withdrawal of patronage see Pete Moore, "Rentier Fiscal Crisis and Regime Stability: Business-State Relations in the Gulf," *Studies in Comparative International Development* 37, no. 1 (2002): 1-34; Stephane Lacroix, *Awakening Islam: The Politics of Religious Dissent in Contemporary Saudi Arabia* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2011); Ellen Lust-Okar, Reinforcing Informal Institutions through Authoritarian Elections: Insights from Jordan, *Middle East Law and Governance*, Vol. 12, No. 1 (2008): 3-37.

development of the “third sector” and to strengthening the autonomy of Kuwaiti civil society, the KAPF ultimately failed to escape its financial dependence on the Kuwaiti state. This key contradiction in its program – using the state to escape the state – left it vulnerable to closure when the political heat rose. Third, it highlights the contested nature of development in ideologically divided societies. From its origins the KAPF became embroiled in broader societal debates about the proper form of modernization. Its critics came from both the left and right, denying the movement the social cohesion it needed to prosper and to resist the mediation of the ever present oil state. Thus this experiment in volunteerism and societal self-sufficiency ended in a demonstration of the primacy of ruling family-led government.