THE CULTURE OF COMMERCIALISM: GLOBALIZATION IN THE UAE

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This study sought to examine how and in what manner the pressures of commercial globalization have impacted the traditional and historical heritage of the local national population of the United Arab Emirates. Utilizing a cultural methodology of analysis, it appears that the very traditional segments of society such as tribal relationships and decision making patterns, the sense of Arabic and Emirati identity, and the general status of women in the workforce have seemingly remained relatively unchanged by commercial globalization. In addition, many of the UAE’s cultural industries appear to have survived the age of modernization, the wave of consumerism, and the rapid influx of immigration that has swept the oil wealthy nation at an unprecedented pace.

However, there do appear to be other areas of society that have exhibited relative change. While the progress of women in the workforce has not been altered dramatically, new opportunities in formalized education and limited choices in nontraditional careers for female Emiratis seem to be viable options today rather than in the past. New cultural industries have begun to emerge as a result of the Emirates’ collective push to become a regional hub for entertainment and the fine arts. In many
cases, a Western approach to business management has begun to take root in an effort to promote the efficiency and effectiveness of the enormous numbers of third country national expatriate workers that have helped shape key infrastructure programs in the UAE and continue to ensure that they remain stable and secure.

By applying the cultural method of analyzing globalization, it appears as if Emirati society has struck a balance between commercialism and traditionalism, neither moving toward a heterogeneous dilution of societal values and norms nor strictly holding on to the status quo of years past. Instead, the UAE has adopted and accepted many of the commercial realities of a global culture while sustaining the traditional yet progressive vision of Sheikh Zayid Al-Nahyan, the founder and first president of the nation. As such, it is to be expected that the UAE will continue this trend of seeking the benefits of a modern, progressive, and innovative financial apparatus and infrastructure while continuing to maintain a very real and sincere focus on the cultural heritage, religious foundation, and communal relationships that have made the UAE one of the most intriguing social, economic, and political success stories in recent years.
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INTRODUCTION

Roughly the size of the state of Maine, and not even a half-century old, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has become an international player on the economic world stage. Aerial pictures that were taken before the discovery of oil reveal that the small Persian Gulf nation was but a settlement amidst a nearly forgotten corner of the Middle East. Today, the same aerial photos will reflect an utterly different and quite dramatic change to a once harsh and unforgiving landscape. From desert to development, the UAE has exploited its gift of oil and has transformed its image from a traditional and modest people to a glamorous and innovative society. Not too long ago the city of Dubai would not have been regarded as a global icon of modernity, commercialism, and internationalism. Today, however, Dubai has entered the global marketplace in style and is positioning itself to challenge the status quo of the world’s most economic powerhouses such as New York, London, Singapore and Hong Kong.

With nearly eighty percent of the population of foreign citizenship, the UAE boasts an impressive diversification among its resident population with many of its residents having come from the Middle East, South-East Asia, and Europe.\textsuperscript{1} Many multinational corporations such as Microsoft, Exxon-Mobile and Boeing have taken advantage of the nation’s favorable tax regulations and strategic geographic location and have set up regional offices in the UAE. Tourism and the hotel industry have

boomed in recent years, especially in the Emirate of Dubai which garners an estimated twenty percent of its gross domestic product from tourism alone.\(^2\) With an indoor ski slope located on the edge of the desert to the only seven star hotel in the world, Dubai has become one of the most desirable places to travel in the Middle East and in the world.

That the UAE has enjoyed global economic success on a grand scale is without question. However, the effects of such a rapid move to a global economy and a globalized society are not as clear nor are they as defined. This study seeks to capture how the effects of globalization have impacted the culture and traditions of the Emirati people. It seeks to uncover what the UAE holds dear in terms of their cultural values amidst the bombardment of commercial products, financial pressures, and political realities. Above all, this thesis is a cultural study that seeks to examine the commonly held belief that Emirati society is sustained and driven only by its great economic successes of the twentieth century.

The first chapter will examine “globalization” as a concept as applied to a people, a society, and a nation. The term itself is a highly charged word, loaded with various meanings depending on how it is defined and utilized. Various theories will be examined in general terms with a continued focus on globalization as a regional, Middle Eastern concept and eventually as witnessed and experienced in the Persian Gulf and the United Arab Emirates. Ultimately, this section will seek to identify how and in

what manner globalization should be applied to Emirati society given the close look at some of the explanations and applications of the term “globalization.”

The second chapter will consider the various cultural aspects of the UAE in terms of what it is doing to maintain its heritage while allowing for new and innovative commercial opportunities to establish themselves among the local community. The role of Emirati women will be briefly touched upon as their place in society has undergone significant changes since commercial globalization was introduced to the nation. Given the unique aspects of the composition and power sharing of the national workforce, a study of such sector of the society would not be complete without an examination of the role of the migrant worker or third country national laborer. The third chapter seeks to find the impact of the “expatriate” worker on the culture of the local (Emirati) national.

In a world of increased interconnectedness thanks to advanced developments in travel and tourism, telecommunications, finance and trade, and education, it is often easy to define one’s cultural values in terms of commercial gains and financial successes. The UAE is no exception. The fourth and final chapter will examine how Sheikh Zayid Al-Nahyan, the late ruler of the UAE, was able to shape his nation and hold on to its traditional heritage of years past while guiding his people into the future of the untested and unknown global world. Various aspects of Emirati culture will be considered (both past and present) and understanding the effects of globalization on the society of the local population will ultimately be the final goal in this cultural study of a portion of the world that is often misunderstood and misinterpreted.
Without a doubt, the world is becoming more global, widely assimilated, and constantly integrated. People are increasingly connected thanks to extreme advances in telecommunications that are becoming more and more affordable and widely available. When attempting to capture the term “globalization” in its entirety, one is faced with an almost insurmountable challenge of attempting to characterize a phenomena that encompasses nearly every aspect of our modern lives. In order to move toward a more comprehensive and accurate portrayal of how and in what manner globalization has affected the Gulf States and in particular the United Arab Emirates, it would be most beneficial to examine a few social and cultural discussions surrounding the global phenomena.

While much that is written about globalization takes a political or economic viewpoint, a cultural methodology of examining global theory has only relatively recently entered the area of study. Nick Bisley provides a sociological approach to what it means to live in a truly global world whereby “modern society” is currently under a constant change to that of a global, integrated world. Goods, services, and capital no longer have strictly economic repercussions, but now have cultural and communal effects on history, tradition, and common values. From what is simply regarded as the “Americanization” of the world vis-à-vis commercial products and

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services, to a truly global understanding of cultural diversity, globalization is regarded in a uniquely different light under this methodology of examination. It is this unique lens by which globalization may be perceived and ultimately better understood, that will be significantly utilized throughout this study.  

In a similar approach to characterizing globalization Chamsy El-Ojeili and Patrick Hayden describe three main theories surrounding the subject. In the first theory, the “homogenization thesis,” non-Western nations find themselves moving toward a Westernization of culture rather than toward an internationalization of society. That is, those non-Western nations are becoming more Western due to the dominant cultural pressures exerted on them by the West and primarily by the United States. The second hypothesis, the “hybridization thesis,” concerns itself essentially with the melding of multiple cultures whereby no one single society finds itself in the dominant position. The last theory, the “polarization thesis,” considers the manner in which global interconnectedness creates a strong sense of cultural solidarity thereby leading more and more to a polarized world. All these theories are what the authors characterize as “cultural globalization,” whereby such a phenomenon “seems most urgently centered around the impact of the growing volume exchanges of cultural products, the rising

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4 Ibid., 27.

power and visibility of the ‘cultural industries,’ the apparent ubiquity of Western popular culture, and the consequences for identity that flow from these other forces.’”\(^6\)

While the authors attempt to characterize and compartmentalize into three distinct paradigms the seemingly unwieldy notion that is globalization, they have sought to define it primarily in terms of a cultural manifestation rather than using the status quo tools of analysis, namely those of an economic and political nature. While much is written and published on the political and economic effects of the pressures of a global marketplace, analyzing globalization first and foremost from a cultural perspective is not quite as commonplace. The authors instead look to the value of the aforementioned “cultural industries,” or commodities, in terms of labor, traditional values, and sociological change that occur under such dimensions.

Such a “globalization of culture” as described by El-Ojeili and Hayden appears to be a fundamental and common theme of critics, of what it means to be “global” in the sense of coming together and losing the sense of national, cultural, and communal identity. In a sense then, one’s cultural community vis-à-vis historical traditions and communal heritage is diminished by seemingly overwhelming socio-economic realities of Western powers. Western commercialism has quite arguably dominated those products and services of other countries and has become regarded as a godsend to some nations and a heavy burden to others. These Western nations are responsible for

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\(^6\) Ibid., 134.
creating, facilitating, and advocating what has been dubbed “cultural imperialism.” It is an interesting concept then to imagine globalization as a subculture in and of itself, one that seeks to conquer communal values with little or no regard for existing tradition and heritage.

Quite differently, Vladimir Korobov describes a phenomena whereby the increased pressures of conformity or dominance by such “imperialism” also have the effect of bringing together the community in appreciation of their unique customs and cultural heritage. He states that, “the intensified globalization process also stimulates reactions among cultural groups who seek to rediscover particularity, localism and difference.” Such urges to discover localism in the context of a greater global community is what Korbov believes to be the most realistic model of global culture; that of a “hybrid” between a national or local community and an international (global) social structure, whereby no one trait takes a dominant role. Such an analysis would fall into line with the “hybridization thesis” that was earlier described in the opinions of El-Ojeili and Hayden but for different reasons. Applied to a local community, this would in effect suggest that the pressures of globalization would perhaps have a solidifying or even bolstering effect on one’s familial, tribal, national or regional relationships.

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7 Ibid., 139.


9 Ibid., 48.
Samir Dasgupta provides a much more ominous tone to the effects of globalization on local cultures and traditional values. He notes, “the widening gap between rich and the poor and rampant commercialization and commodification of social life undermine the social integration in the Third World countries and also threaten the moral, ethical and economic identity and the weakening of ethnic and communal solidarity and social harmony.”

In third world countries like those of the Middle East this would suggest that there is not only an economic widening gap between rich and poor but also a gap between those cultural values that were once held dear and the commercial and economic pressures and realities that have since minimized their importance on the community as a whole. In this instance, globalization then acts as a wedge between heritage and socio-economic status thereby diminishing social values and cultural norms.

Regionally speaking, global movements in the Middle East have often been met with a skeptical outlook as commercial pressures, often of a Western nature, and have created perceived threats of hostile intentions as earlier described as “cultural imperialism.” As Anoushiravan Ehteshami contends, “globalization is not only seen as a rival of Islamic ways, but also as an alien force divorced from Muslim realities,” in a manner brought to bear by what the author states is a perception of “Western consumerism and its throw-away culture.” He cites an example of how the holy month of Ramadan has become increasingly commercialized rather than celebrated as a

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spiritual occasion. Ehteshami states that these feelings are not on the “fringe” of the Islamic communities but are more commonly held fears and beliefs.\textsuperscript{11} While his observations and opinions are more than certainly open to criticism and debate, he offers a viewpoint that calls into question the relationship between the religious traditionalism of Middle Eastern Islamic communities and the ever-increasing commercialism of a global culture. It is, as he states, this relationship or “friction” between the two notions, traditionalism vs. commercial globalism, that is more than likely crucial to understanding the similar effects on Emirati cultural heritage.\textsuperscript{12}

Abbas Mehdi offers a similar, albeit political, viewpoint of the effects that global pressures have and will have on the Arab World. He contends that due to globalization, the Middle East should adapt a more democratic political approach to leadership and move away from traditional forms of governance while embracing commercial diversification. Gulf countries in particular, he states, must find suitable economic alternatives to the petrochemical industry, move away from their immigration dependent workforce, and create and develop a national workforce based on an increasingly privatized labor sector.\textsuperscript{13} In analyzing Mehdi’s perspectives it seems relatively apparent that he means to suggest that Gulf nations would be better off if they adapted a more Westernized approach to governance and economy. He continues to


\textsuperscript{12} Ibid., 152.

\textsuperscript{13} Abbas Medhi, “Globalization and the Arab World: A Socioeconomic Perspective,” in Dasgupta, 244.
state that “the lack of free trade and democratic civil society at large in Arab countries contributes significantly to their decline.” By adopting these more Westernized approaches, he feels that Arab states would be better able to manage the pressures of globalization and therefore benefit from all the advantages a global society has to offer.14

While the opinions and statements of Mehdi and Ehteshami certainly take their own unique and personalized approach, their statements raise important and salient questions about what globalization means regionally to the Arab world. Such topics are especially relevant to the Arabian Gulf as it has recently been the region in the Middle East that has undergone unprecedented commercial growth over the last several years. Ehteshami comments that globalization is perceived by many in the Islamic World as a threat to its well-being and a notion that is far fetched from traditional norms. While it may be difficult to determine exactly how his comments are to be applied across the region, given the subtleties of religion, heritage, and history, what Ehteshami appears to refer to are the unique pressures that Western style commercialism can have on traditional communities such as some of those in the Arab world. Such commercialism, regarded as one of the foundations of globalization, then naturally becomes the offender; a foreign invader of cultural heritage.

In general, Middle Eastern views of globalization are often thought of in terms of what impact it might have on social and cultural values of tradition and identity while

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14 Ibid., 245.
Western views primarily concern themselves with questions of commercial, economic, and material culture.\(^{15}\) It would follow then that the pressures of global culture would manifest themselves differently according to the manner in which the nature of globalization is perceived. To a Westerner, such examples of pressures may very well be those of a strictly commercial nature, such as purchasing a more fuel efficient automobile, the latest mobile phone, or acquiring the newest fashion in shoes or clothes. Imports and exports, the mortgage industry, national wages, and domestic and international stocks would all very well be the primary topics of discussion for a Westerner to have regarding globalization. To a person from the Middle East, one might expect a very different conversation surrounding cultural identity, traditional history, national ties to regional partnerships, and familial and social relationships.

What then could be said of the attitudes of certain populations within the Arab Middle East? Fauzi Najjar states that there are three basic perceptions among the “Arab intellectual class.” The first concerns itself with the utter rejection of global pressures from the West, ultimately equating globalization with the aforementioned “cultural imperialism” that is feared to be the cause of cultural degradation. The second attitude regards globalization as not only inevitable but desirable. The technological advances, increased communications, and methodology of education are to be welcomed without attempting to hold on to a past that has no place in the ever changing global community. This group, Najjar states, does not feel that by embracing a global culture that they will

loose their Arab sense of identity or national ties. The third group advocates for accepting or rejecting certain tenants of globalization; accepting those that benefit and rejecting those that serve to hamper their society. Najjar feels that this group holds a view that is somewhat “naïve” given the sweeping and powerful pressures of globalization. In all cases, be it for or against globalization, all Arabs involved in the debate, states Najjar, assert that their cultural heritage and social traditions must be protected.16

Focusing on the “Islamic Crescent,” Leonard Stone quite similarly characterizes the thoughts, opinions, and attitudes of Muslims across a wide spectrum. He states that there is no real consensus regarding the applicability and acceptance of globalization, but rather an eagerness to adopt the technological advances of modern commercialism while attempting to filter various aspects of global pressure through cultural lenses. In such a manner, it is the political and economic aspects that are the issue of debate rather than the tangible economic goods that Islamic societies tend to consume. By doing so, Stone feels that the concept of an “Islamic identity” may have to be reinterpreted after some sort of an agreement has been made by the Islamic world regarding what exactly it means to be “Islamic” and to live in an Islamic community.17 While questions of religion and globalization in and of itself are not the target of this study, Stone’s


analysis serves as a reminder of the various perspectives that religion brings to the table, especially in and among Middle Eastern traditions, as Islam is unquestionably an integral part of life, tradition, and culture in the Middle East, and the religion of its people most certainly plays a significant role in the development and facilitation of the attitudes, perceptions, and characterizations of globalization.

Discussing the Middle East as a whole is certainly useful in gaining a regional perspective in terms of how regional culture impacts that of the national norms. To this end, what can be said of the Arabian Gulf in terms of how it has experienced the pressures of globalization relative to the aforementioned statements? There is no doubt that the Gulf has in recent history experienced enormous growth of its commercial sectors. The petrochemical industry has made many of the economic successes possible and more recently certain nations within the Gulf have utilized their successes in an effort to diversify their economies (however great or little) in order to sustain increased economic development. In terms of economic development, many of these nations, such as Qatar, Bahrain, and the UAE, have come a long way in such little time. Their physical infrastructures have seen extensive overhauls and new development is always a reality of life for their residents. The financial sectors have followed suit, begun to concern themselves with the international markets, and have upgraded their exchanges in order to take full advantage of a global market place. Multinational corporations have taken interest in the Gulf markets and are now using the region as a base of operations given the excellent quality of life, first-rate telecommunications
infrastructure, and increasingly available medical care. While the gross domestic product of other Middle Eastern nations has stagnated or barely sustained growth, the nations of the Gulf have excelled considerably. All the commercial elements of globalization have certainly moved into the Gulf, more so than in any other region of the Middle East.\textsuperscript{18}

Given that the rapid and sustained pressures of a global market place are most significantly present in the Gulf, what then are the implications of a culture that has had relatively little time to adjust and adapt to the cultural realities of globalization? The Arabian Gulf is an area that has a longstanding traditional and cultural heritage, one that is arguably among the most traditional in the region. Given its recent and rapid commercial development coupled with its traditional past, it serves as an excellent example in which to examine how and in what manner the sheer forces of commercial development and progress have exerted their pressures on the cultural heritage of their people. Which theory of El-Ojeili and Hayden would be most applicable to the Gulf? Do the forces of a global community leave Gulf nations traditionally more divided and estranged from their past, or are cultural heritages strengthened by the “homogenizing” effect of globalization? Or, instead, are Gulf States able to balance the benefits of global commercialization with a stable and sustained tie to their historical past?

effectively filtering out what is socially desirable from what is communally reprehensible?

The answers to such questions are better answered by taking an in depth view into the cultural subtleties of each Gulf nation (or community) in relation to the commercial developments of that particular state. This study has identified the United Arab Emirates in this regard as it has probably the most extreme examples of rapid global commercialization of all the Gulf States. In what has been described as an unprecedented growth of economy and infrastructure, the UAE and in particular, the cities of Abu Dhabi and Dubai, have risen to the forefront of regional and international economic development. However, the nation is still inexorably bound by deeply religious and traditional values that remain evident in all aspects of life. In the succeeding chapters, an in-depth examination of certain key aspects of the UAE will be applied in an effort to uncover the cultural effects of globalization in a time of unprecedented growth, development, expansion, and commercialization.

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CHAPTER II
TRADITIONS AND HERITAGE

While at first glance the UAE’s major cities, such as Abu Dhabi and Dubai, may appear to have been founded only fifty years ago by an almost instant creation of high-rise buildings made of concrete, steel, and the latest concepts in architectural design. Quite the opposite, the Emirates is a country that has a long cultural and traditional history that goes back centuries and is heavily steeped in notions of familial and tribal relationships, cultural industries, and religion. It is an often misdirected and misunderstood belief that the UAE has little to no history or cultural heritage perhaps due to its sudden and rapid modernization that his since been met by the forces of commercialism and globalization. To visit the UAE once or twice could certainly give a tourist such an impression as its hotels, shopping malls, and leisure facilities create a sense of “acculturation” or at least a “culture of commercialization” as the title of this thesis suggests.

In their study on the Gulf and the effects of globalization, Fox, Mourtada-Sabbah, and al-Mutawa quite clearly depict the state of affairs in the Gulf with respect to its rapid development as follows:

In the Gulf, traditional structure has effectively managed and integrated, where appropriate, the forces of globalization. Traditional Gulf leadership encountered and began dealing with the nascent forces of globalization in the early 1970s almost as a tidal wave – the oil embargo all happened within a span of just three
years. In this short time, the small states went from highly localized concerns to confronting even the superpowers within the world arena.\(^1\)

Here, the authors refer to the familial and tribal dealings with first the colonial powers that once ruled the region and eventually with individual superpowers such as China and the United States. What have changed little over the years are the cultural and familial bonds that tie and have tied the region together over the years. In a similar manner, the same can be said of the UAE itself, as it was and still is ruled by a federation of states that are, in turn, lead by a family of rulers that stake their claim to the decision making process in historical terms.\(^2\)

According to Frauke Heard-Bey, the familial bonds that form alliances and relationships, as in the past, are one of the most important indicators of status in society today in the United Arab Emirates.\(^3\) Following this point then, it would seem that those families that historically held favor or power among the tribal community (be it through origins in wealth or other determiners) in the past, would continue to hold such positions in the current decision making apparatus. This is most evident and is clearly the case with the late ruler of the UAE, Sheikh Zayid Al Nahyan, and with the ruling families of most of the seven emirates in the UAE. Sheikh Zayid, as will be discussed in a separate chapter, constitutes perhaps the best example when examining how family


lineage and cultural heritage has more than likely defined the course of history in the past and has developed the future vision and method of progress of key people and decision makers in Emirati society.

On a much more localized and national level what then has been the effects of the pressures of commercialization given what Fox, Mourtada-Sabbah, and Mutawa have stated regarding traditional leadership? How have the people of the Emirates been affected by this phenomena? It is quite apparent that the physical makeup of Emirati cities have dramatically changed from desert villages to urban metropolises. However, it would seem unlikely that a culture that has been in existence for centuries would change in similar fashion and in such short time. While modernity has been a reality of life for Emiratis, does it necessarily mean that they have embraced modernity and its global commercial consequences to the detriment of their cultural past? Judith Caesar describes a typical scene at an Emirati shopping mall, an “American-style monument to consumerism,” whereby consumers from all over the world can be found. She states that the mall was among the most “cosmopolitan” places she had ever seen, with South Asians, Arabs and Westerners all in the same place to purchase goods and services.\(^4\) In a truly global fashion then, the Emirati marketplace might very well be the grandest form of globalization as a form of social interaction that can be observed in the Emirates.

\(^4\) Judith Caesar, Writing of the Beaten Track: Reflections of the Meaning of Travel and Culture in the Middle East (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 9.
However, Caesar believes that the effects of the importation of Western style consumerism are superficial among locals given the strong historical attachments mentioned earlier to their cultural and traditional heritage. She states, “students could carry cell phones and wear baseball caps without feeling that their culture was threatened because of a strong sense of identity that came from family, religion, and tribe.”\(^5\) Caesar raises an interesting scenario whereby modernization, commercialism, and global culture have together created unique achievements in the Persian Gulf. However, the culture of a commercial society in a Western sense, according to Caesar, is not yet present among Emirati culture. Instead, they have adopted a limited acceptance of such a culture of commercialism and have kept the pressures on the surface of their societal norms due to their strong attachments and bonds to a historical sense of traditional family values that have been predicated on a tribal communal system.\(^6\)

To the visiting tourist the Emirati people may seem as though they do not have much of a historical past given the relative small number of artifacts, paintings, ancient structures, and other items that many Western tourists expect to see when visiting a location that is “culturally rich.” Caesar states that it is the Emirati people themselves that carry the history, the past, the present and the future all in the manner in which they

\(^5\) Caesar, 11.

\(^6\) Ibid.
live their lives. In other words, to study the traditions and historical heritage of the Emirates is to study the people. Caesar writes of the manner in which the cultural traditions and norms can be viewed by outsiders to Emirati society:

There was history and sociology ‘lite,’ the interpreted history that showed on the surface and which any foreigner could glean from guidebooks and replicas and restored villages before retreating to comfort of the bar and hotel room. There was the history of the imaginative and uniformed, who could see what they wanted to see. But there was also the real history, the flow of people and events that led from the past to the present, that had been interrupted and destroyed and rebuilt, and that kept on flowing and defining the character of the place.

Here, the author refers to the type of reality that one can witness; particularly those who do not want or simply know how to look beyond the new construction of glamorous skyscrapers, the enormous shopping malls, and other modern commercial wonders in an effort to see the “real history,” the reality that is the Emirates and its people. It would seem as if Caesar is pointing out that the culture of commercialism that one may witness in the UAE is on the periphery of the true cultural heritage of the people or what she refers to as a “history and sociology lite.” Caesar seems to be acknowledging that just under the surface of all the wealth and glamour lies a very real and very traditional people that have always looked to the past to define the future and that constantly evaluate their place in the world.

Sayyid Hurreiz quite similarly appears to agree with the general concepts of what Caesar states, particularly with the manner in which familial lineage and status

\[\text{footnote}{^7}\text{Ibid.}\]
\[\text{footnote}{^8}\text{Ibid., 38.}\]
dictates the roles, responsibilities, and status of tribal decision making patterns. He notes that because the key decision makers (the leading Sheikhs) were able to carefully balance tradition and culture together with the modern technological progress and economic wealth, the UAE was able to be successfully united given the separating nature of tribal differences that can easily take hold in any given community of peoples. It is this careful balance, states Hurreiz, that was one of the leading causes of the UAE’s rapid and sustained successful development in such a short period of time. This is an important argument that Hurreiz makes, in that it clearly defines the manner in which the past has so heavily impacted the future; especially in light of the ongoing commercial pressures that were placed on Emirati society in the past and are still pressuring its traditions and heritage to this day.

Hurreiz concedes however that it is a reality that has recently come under some pressure due to the global market place which has ultimately lead to a change in the traditional concepts and values that have been the core determiners of nearly every aspect of life in the UAE. He states that it is the movement away from “traditional occupations,” a change in the economic and social realities, and the manner in which foreign laborers (such as nannies) have impacted the lives of Emirati youth that have lead to the movement away from the traditional norms of life in the UAE. This movement, states Hurreiz, is quite obviously due to the economic and commercial boom that was due to the discovery, exploitation, and development of oil fields on Emirati

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soil. Such traditional occupations such as pearl diving and fishing have long since been overtaken by oil drilling and refining operations, investment banking and development centers, and the hotel and tourism industry. Such a dramatic change in these economic sectors have expectedly changed the manner in which Emiratis socialize among themselves, conduct business across the board, and interact with foreigners in both public and private settings. Their children can be seen with foreign nannies who act as surrogate parents, oftentimes spending more time during the day with the children then their biological parents. This of course, would act as a catalyst for change in the longstanding and deep sense of familial ties and tribal connections that Caesar states were and still are the vital component of Emirati society.

Where life has not succumbed to the rigors and pressures of global commercialism, according to Hurreiz, is in the traditional areas where such pressures would have little exposure to influence and change; namely those areas surrounding the immensely private dealings with childbirth, death and burial, and marriage. These areas, states Hurreiz, have largely remained more or less traditionally intact and have not changed due to the economic and social pressures that have accompanied globalization’s manifestations in the UAE. Through faith, ritual, and tradition, these areas of life have not had the occasion to be influenced as they are not on the periphery of cultural norms, but are at the center of what helps to define one culture from the next. It is quite expected then, that these sensitive areas would not be overly exposed nor

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10 Hurreiz, 26-29.
heavily influenced by commercial pressures that globalization brings to the forefront of other aspects of life.\textsuperscript{11}

Making a similar argument as Hurreiz, Sulayman Khalaf believes that the traditions of many of the Gulf nations have been compromised due to the vast influx of oil wealth into their communities. For the most part the historic and old city centers and outlying villages have been cleared or demolished in and effort to make way for modern developments and key infrastructure projects, thereby eliminating the very few physical and visual reminders of cultural architecture and ways of life in the past.\textsuperscript{12} In addition, Khalaf states that the skewed ratio of local to foreign populations that make up the total number of inhabitants in many of the Gulf states (including the UAE) has also led to the compromise of traditional values and beliefs given the influence that foreign populations bring from their own cultures. According to Khalaf, this has led to a rather large dependency on commercial products and the lifestyles that surround them, which has been one of the accusations made against the UAE because it is seen by many to be a focal point for consumption rather than production. While certainly these pressures have demonstrated an ability to weaken certain aspects of Gulf society, Khalaf feels that there is now a growing tendency toward nationalism, particularly due to the large dependency on foreigners. These locals feel as though their identities are being threatened by the growing global presence in their society and, according to Khalaf,

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 86-104.

\textsuperscript{12} Sulayman Khalaf, “The Evolution of the Gulf City Type, Oil, and Globalization,” in Fox, Mourtada-Sabbah, and al-Mutawa, 248.
there may very well be a “backlash” of nationalist pride and traditional ways of life in the very near future.\textsuperscript{13}

In an effort to sustain their cultural heritage, many offices within the UAE central and local governments have begun to create cultural centers and heritage sites whereby local nationals and tourists alike can see what life was like in the past. From small heritage centers to large efforts to promote and foster an understanding of traditional Emirati culture, this effort has become one of the primary ways in which the government of the UAE has decided to both preserve and market its past traditions so that Emirati youth will not forget and new arrivals to the nation can learn and understand more about the native community.\textsuperscript{14}

In an effort to examine how the process of preserving and promoting culture among the effects of globalization can be achieved, it is perhaps most useful to examine briefly the very traditional setting of the Emirate of Sharjah. Physically connected to the city of Dubai, Sharjah, unlike its neighbor, has been a longstanding traditionalist, yet very commercial, state of the UAE. According to Fox, Mourtada-Sabbah, and al-Mutawa, Sharjah has “conscientiously cultivated and promoted history, heritage, and educational industries.”\textsuperscript{15} According to the authors, the city has done so through the use of standard educational centers and the like, but has really made an effort to create

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., 250-260.

\textsuperscript{14} Hurreiz, 65.

\textsuperscript{15} John W. Fox, Nada Mourtada-Sabbah, and Mohammed al-Mutawa, “Heritage Revivalism in Sharjah,” in Fox, Mourtada-Sabbah, and al-Mutawa, 275.
visual reminders of years past by incorporating traditional architecture into cutting edge modern designs of skyscrapers, hotels, and other significant structures. They believe that Sharjah has visions of becoming the cultural center of the UAE, which is especially compelling given its close proximity to Dubai.16 Perhaps it is because of its shared border with Dubai, the significant amount of foreign presence that is in Sharjah (which is not unlike Abu Dhabi or Dubai), or its traditionalist body of rulers, it appears to be quite an interesting combination of commercial global development and the cultural industry of preserving cultural heritage that is most striking in this case.

One of the cultural industries that appear to have survived the onslaught of commercial products and global name brands is the production and sale of herbal medicines on the open market. Although there are adequate medical centers throughout most of the UAE and very modern facilities in the larger cities, the proliferation of herbal medicinal sales is a current practice that has survived from past traditions. Such remedies are used for a variety of reasons to include the curing and prevention of various illnesses.17 In a similar manner, the process of buying and selling gold jewelry has an apparent place in the past and present makeup of female Emirati material culture. While this claim seems as though it would be less connected to culture than to economics, the place for gold jewelry in female Emirati culture could very well be said

16 Ibid., 285.

17 Hurreiz, 116.
to be of cultural significance given not only the relative low cost of gold in the area and
the influx of various designs and patterns from foreign countries such as India.\textsuperscript{18}

More obvious and easily apparent in this regard are the vast amounts of “cultural
excursions” that tourists can purchase in order to experience the life of the desert
nomad. These package tours are widely available at any major hotel in the UAE and
usually include a camel riding experience and a dinner at sunset amongst sand dunes.
While one could argue that this is a “cultural” experience, one has to wonder as to the
educational or cultural significance that one encounters by going on one of these
excursions. Quite possibly more of a product of the tourism industry than anything else,
these experiences nonetheless are geared towards “preserving” the traditional past while
making way for the financial future that is tourism and the service industry.

In following the example set by the Emirate of Sharjah, both Abu Dhabi and
Dubai have recently followed this movement, with plans to invest heavily in the
creation of new cultural centers and heritage sites throughout their respective states.
Many of the officials responsible for the foundation and promotion of such sites point to
the fact that their Arab and Emirati identities have been put to the test given the vast
amount of foreign influence that has flooded into the UAE since the oil boom and
subsequent economic development. Meena Janardhan points out in her article entitled
“UAE: Debate Grows Over Modernity’s Effect on Arab Values,” that there is a growing
debate in the UAE as to the effects of modernization on the local culture of the

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 159.
community given the movements by Dubai and Abu Dhabi to become “cultural centers” of the Near East. Both emirates have made attempts to promote not only their own sense of cultural tradition and history, but to put themselves on the world map by Western standards. In Abu Dhabi, plans for a Guggenheim Museum has been much the subject of debate and speculation given the criticisms that have accompanied this move toward a Western sense of “culture.” Janardhan points out that critics state “that Arab countries are aping Western traditions and that many urban Arabs are copying, buying, adopting or being stimulated by Western cultural traditions.” Proponents argue that such centers do more to promote local heritage rather than to isolate it, as globalization, they argue, becomes a dangerous force only when it creates a homogenous society. 19

In Dubai a similar effect has taken place as auction houses such as Christie’s have set up shop in an effort to expand the sales of the Middle Eastern art market which until recently has garnered relatively little interest beyond traditional style paintings. The movement has witnessed a rather significant push by the auction houses to sale works of contemporary art from regional artists from the Arabian Gulf, including Iran. Given the enormous influx of oil wealth to the region, the increased interest in regional art has translated into increased asking prices, final sales figures, and publicity of the

Middle Eastern contemporary artwork.\textsuperscript{20} What is interesting and equally important about this recent trend is that the commercial goals of a Western approach to fine art sales has been incorporated in a manner that brings regional interest over regional pieces rather than simply duplicating what is done in New York and London whereby the sale of Western and (on occasion) East Asian pieces tend to dominate the sales catalogs. In this case, the commercial system serves to develop and encourage regional artists to produce culturally authentic works that are unique to the region.

In the area of film, Dubai also plays host to the Dubai International Film Festival, an event that showcases films from around the globe as well as films created by local Emirati filmmakers that depict various aspects of life and culture in the UAE. The festival’s creators and promoters state that they choose Dubai to host this annual event because Dubai has a rich history of acting as a junction between East and West. As such, organizers believe that, given its cosmopolitan and multicultural makeup, Dubai serves as an important city in which to hold such an event that serves to promote ethnic diversity and cultural understanding.\textsuperscript{21} Event officials seem to have grasped the notion that Dubai, and most of the UAE in general, has been inundated by global trends of economy and culture that have served to bring many different types of people from many different parts of the world to the UAE. This film festival seems to be another


indicator of how Emirati officials have utilized the pressures of globalization to create opportunities to expand cultural interaction, dialogue, and understanding through a medium that often has economic and commercial implications.

In his article entitled “The Impact of Globalization on Cultural Industries in United Arab Emirates,” Mohammed Naim Chaker discusses the impact of the pressures of globalization on the cultural industry of the media sector, with particular attention given to the creation and operation of Dubai Media City, which houses local as well as international media companies such as CNN, McGraw Hill, and Reuters. Chaker feels that because these types of cultural industries “convey lifestyles and values with both an informative and entertainment function,” they have historically tended to favor those values and traditions of the dominant entertainment and media producers, namely from the West. In this regard he states that:

In fact, all other emirates in the UAE have taken steps to protect all aspects of the Arabian culture in the emerging scenario of globalization. For instance, the Dubai Shopping Festival which seeks to attract tourists from various parts of the world is anchored in the local traditions and cultural values. Being an open economy, the UAE has witnessed the imports of a wide range of cultural products and services in recent years. These products and services have certainly affected the lifestyles of people in the country.  

The impact of the Dubai Shopping Festival or of the various outlets in Dubai Media City raises important questions about how the people of the UAE have been able to

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import outside goods and services (often Western in nature and coupled with global pressures) in popular forums such as consumer products and entertainment venues. The so called “pop culture” of twenty-first century television and entertainment has certainly been a well known buzzword in recent years most probably because of its ability to sway popular opinion, cultural outlook, and consumer preference. It is to be expected that the “pop culture” that is offered by Dubai Media City would be no different in this regard. Ultimately, however, Chaker feels as though the UAE has been able to successfully balance their deep Islamic and cultural traditions with the influx of Westernized ideologies and cultural tendencies through a system of governmental regulation and community outreach.\footnote{Ibid., under “The Case of Dubai Media City.”}

While the private sector has done much to push the aforementioned cultural industries due to economic realities, the Emirati government seems to have made efforts to promote and preserve these industries in similar fashion. In Dubai, the Authority for Culture and Arts has allowed for a museum that will specifically focus on the life and history of the Prophet Mohammed. The creators of the museum may have very well had the intention of placing the museum in Dubai given the increasing tourism industry and regional and international notoriety that has recently been bestowed on the city.\footnote{Bassam Za’za’, “Prophet Museum ‘an Invitation to Know About True Islam,’” \textit{Gulf News (Dubai)}, March 13, 2008, \url{http://archive.gulfnews.com/articles/08/03/13/10197034html} (accessed March 13, 2008).} Or perhaps this was done in order to bring more “cultural significance” to a city that is often criticized for not having easily seen vestiges of heritage. Either way, this decision
to bring religious heritage into the fold in Dubai highlights the juxtaposition between
culture and commercialism and is yet another example of how the UAE seems to be
handling the pressures to both sustain the rapid pace of economic development and
provide a very real and significantly authentic outlet in which to promote and display
cultural heritage.

UAE governmental educational exhibits and opportunities, such as that of the
Prophet Mohammed Museum, serve most of all to perhaps reveal the importance of
formal education in general in a country that has only relatively recently been able to
develop and foster a rich formal scholastic environment. Numerous foreign colleges
and universities have created programs that are physically located in the Gulf region,
such as Georgetown’s program in Doha, Qatar, or George Mason’s facility located in
Ras Al-Khaimah, UAE. The realities of obtaining a visa to study in the United State in
the post-9/11 world have perhaps made this system more attractive to young Gulf
Arabs, especially given that two of the 9/11 high-jackers were from the UAE. Or
perhaps it is because of strong cultural pressures for female students to stay within the
household of their family that has spawned interest in bringing foreign educational
opportunities to the UAE. Either way, opportunities for Emiratis to obtain a “Western”
education have multiplied significantly over the years as globalization has taken root.
However, the question of how educational changes have impacted Emirati culture
(especially the Emirati household) is still something that requires a brief examination in
order to determine the effects, if any, globalization has had on this social and cultural norm.

In his article entitled “Wave of Change in the Persian Gulf,” David Ignatius states that the UAE, under the vision and direction of Sheikh Zayid Al-Nahyan, has made education one of the nation’s most important priorities in a country that once suffered considerably from the lack of adequate educational opportunities. He notes that the UAE has not only embraced the concept of the importance of education but has also taken a leading role in such regard. He states that the manner in which Emirati officials have taken on this responsibility is “the way progress in the Arab world should happen, but too rarely does.”

He further notes that the UAE has been able to create a “model for the way change can come to a devoutly Muslim country without destroying its cultural traditions.” The UAE has promoted change, Ignatius states, because they have stressed the value of open communication via the Internet, required the use of the English language in some types of schools (such as institutions of technology), and underscored the importance of female participation in educational opportunities. Such methodologies of change, he notes, are not always popular with religious traditionalists yet the UAE has moved ahead in this regard.

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26 Ibid.

27 Ibid.
The Ignatius article highlights the fundamental strengths of reform due to globalization’s economic and cultural effects and also illustrates past deficiencies that have burdened the public education system in Emirati schools. Ignatius raises the issues of female participation, English proficiency, and open and relatively uncensored access to knowledge thanks to the Internet. Most of these areas have been addressed with the invitation by Emirati officials to foreign universities to set up programs of higher education in the UAE. However, what can be said about the state of affairs of public schools in the wake of the pressures of globalization? More specifically, how have the authorities in the UAE handled the administration and organization of schools that are traditionally less likely to have vast amounts of financial grants or public interest as say universities of higher education. What effects, if any, on the state run educational institutions have been caused by the enormous increase in wealth that the nation has experienced due the realities of the global market place?

In a five year study of the government run early childhood education system in Dubai, Abdullah Hokal, set out to identify the aforementioned effects, actions (or inactions), and state of affairs of elementary schools in one of the most wealthiest emirates in the UAE. His study, entitled “Managing Progress Monitoring in United Arab Emirate Schools,” concerns itself with the manner in which Emirati public school administrators have dealt with monitoring progress among its students amidst what Hokal calls a “violent acceleration of cultural change,” due to the rapid influx of
petrochemical dollars to the region. Hokal summarizes the general and current state of affairs of “social services” (including public schools) in relation to the excellent modern infrastructure of the UAE’s large cities:

The coastal cities are modern, in parts, ultra-modern. The social services, on the other hand, while not neglected, have not been so successfully implanted. This is in large part due to the acute shortage of skilled and experienced locals for administration, which is true of education at all levels. States are forced to rely on staff very heavily on Arabic speaking expatriates from countries such as Jordan, Egypt, Yemen and Pakistan. In addition, the predominance of large families means that schools constantly struggle to keep up with births. Trying to maintain stability under many competing pressures in the obvious managerial priority. Quantity prevails over quality.

In addition, Hokal states, due to the nature of the employment or labor market in the UAE (namely that it is made up of expatriate workers) and given the fact that the state schooling system is funded from the state and not by personal income tax, there is little to no room for criticism or complaints about the lack of standards. While much financial backing has been given to the institutions of higher education, notes Hokal, it is actually finding suitable and qualified local students from the state funded school system that has been one of the challenges of dealing with the realities of the effects of a global marketplace. Monitoring the progress of the students, states the author, is one

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29 Ibid.
of the steps toward a mission wide management and development program of public education that is obviously deficient in Emirati primary educational institutions.\textsuperscript{30}

While Hokal certainly raises important questions about how the educational system in the UAE has reacted to the pressures of globalization, perhaps a more subtly significant cultural issues is raised by the Ignatius article, whereby Ignatius makes the statement that women’s participation in the UAE’s educational system is being promoted in a manner that is perhaps disproportionate to the efforts geared toward men.\textsuperscript{31} In turn, this particular matter points to perhaps a larger issue within the general context of how globalization has impacted the cultural attitudes, practices, and opinions in the UAE; that is the general role of women in the UAE. While certainly a topic that could be an entire study in and of itself, it is most certainly an appropriate topic to touch on in this study given its profoundly important place in any society and in most certainly in the Emirati cultural context.

Fatima Al-Sayegh offers a historical study and analysis of the social and economic roles that women have played throughout recent history in the UAE. She states that due to the economic boom of the last half-century of the 1900s, the role and status of Emirati women has been relatively marginalized and minimized compared to the previous historical place in society that they had held in the past. Al-Sayegh states that from the period of time from 1900 to approximately 1930 women enjoyed substantial economic positions in society although their social mobility and freedoms

\textsuperscript{30} Hokal and Shaw, under “Monitoring in UAE Schools.”

\textsuperscript{31} Ignatius, “Wave of Change in the Persian Gulf.”
were very limited. As the men were often involved in shipping, trading or pearling, many women (particularly in the middle and lower classes) found themselves in a position whereby their involvement in local commerce, for example, the harvesting and selling of agricultural products, was a key component of the economic stability of the community. For the reason of their contribution to the economic well being of society, according to Al-Sayegh, the women of the middle to lower classes were able to enjoy a more liberal interpretation of how social norms were to be applied as their responsibilities did not solely revolve around childbearing and managing the affairs of the home. From the period from 1930 to the early 1970s, women experienced a worsening of their status in society due to the regional economic downturn of this timeframe. According to the author, the role of women “shrank causing a serious decline in the status of women.”

Al-Sayegh states that from the time of Sheikh Zayid’s ultimately successful bid to unify the country, the role of women in society was revisited in an effort (in a large part) to leverage their numbers and to “join forces with men in building the nation.” After the major oil finds of the 1960s, the vast influx of foreigners from lower income nations were being shifted to fulfill the needs of the oil exploration and harvesting companies at a rapid pace. It seems logical then, that in an effort to follow the

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33 Al-Sayegh, under “The Third Stage.”
unification programs set forth by Sheikh Zayid, Emirati society would look to increase the effects of its national population by reevaluating the economic and social norms of women in society. According to Al-Sayegh, this was to be achieved first and foremost by promoting and supporting the attendance of women in the classroom and later in many aspects of a new and global economy. Citing statistical evidence of female attendance increases in higher education (nearly fourteen times that of previous years), Al-Sayegh points out that because of this increase the illiteracy rate of females in the UAE dropped nearly thirty percent in approximately five years.\(^{34}\) This statistical example is of course subject to more scrutiny given the gathering techniques of the source and of the nature of gathering of statistics in the UAE at that time, however it does in the very least point to some evidence as to the improvements in the education of women as a result of the nation’s desire to unify under the “Emiratization” of the workforce. Through increases in literacy and education, notes Al-Sayegh, the status of women in the economy and the household has changed significantly compared to past years. She states that as women move into the workforce, with many graduating from colleges of higher education, they will continue to shed the traditional roles they have played in and around the household. However, the author contends in her study, there is much more room for improvement regarding the economic and social mobility of women into different parts of the economic sector as they move from more traditional

\(^{34}\) Ibid.
careers as teachers or nurses to various other areas of the economy that were once held only by men.\textsuperscript{35}

While it seems fairly accurate to state that the status of women has more than likely changed considerably over the last half century in the UAE as the nation has urbanized and modernized, due in a large part to the tremendous influx of wealth, the situation becomes less clear as to the cultural connection between modernization and urbanization and the changing role and status of women vis-à-vis the increase in quality, availability, and variety of educational opportunities. Certainly a more modern society will have with it more educational opportunities but it is important to note the difference here between modernization and globalization in this example. It seems, at least on the outset, that because the UAE has had increased exposure to global markets and communities from about the 1960-1970s (due to the discovery of exportable oil and the unification of the nation), the nation has modernized significantly. The Al-Sayegh study has given a limited perspective on the pressures placed on Emirati society from a vantage point that is outside the social walls of the family, namely the role of the female Emirati as it relates to the economy and social structures outside the family nucleus.

How then do these same global pressures then impact the traditional role of women within the family circle? As Mouza Ghubash notes in his article “Social Development in the United Arab Emirates,” there has been a marked increase in the participation of females in higher education. This, he believes, is due to the traditional

\textsuperscript{35} Al-Sayegh, under “Conclusion.”
reality that a large percentage of women typically do not take up employment in the
government sector (and very little in the private workplace) and therefore simply have
the time to continue and take up studies in university level formal education. However,
the author notes, women have made large advances in integrating themselves into the
workforce via education into such sectors as public education and medicine. This, he
believes, is also due in a large part to the government’s emphasis that is placed on
education in general and their recent push to provide more opportunities to women
outside of traditional educational and career roles. As a result, the author speculates
that because of the increased participation of women in education and the workforce,
the social status of women, in general, has improved and has begun to move away from
the more historically traditional roles of society.\textsuperscript{36}

In a study of the cultural and generational changes in family life among Emirati
mothers and daughters, Paul Schvaneveldt, Jay Schvaneveldt, and Jennifer Kerpelman,
offer a few insights into the manner in which modernity and globalization have
impacted the cultural norms of the female role in many Emirati families. They note that
“because of the rapid development and fast paced transformations, many social changes
and social problems have emerged in most sectors of society, including the schools,
drug usage, and changes in family values...specifically, changes in gender role attitudes
and beliefs toward family relationships are in all likelihood experiencing significant

\textsuperscript{36} Mouza Ghubash, “Social Development in the United Arab Emirates,” in \textit{Perspectives on the
United Arab Emirates}, ed. Edmund Ghareeb and Ibrahim Al Abed (London: Trident Press, 1997), 279-
281.
The methodology of the study concerns an analysis of the relationships between mothers and daughters as they apply to various areas of interest discussed below. The study was based on selfanswered questionnaires that were completed by thirty-three pairs of mothers and daughters of Emirati families.

The authors study highlight three fundamental areas of change with respect to the role of females in the Emirati familial nucleus; namely education, perspectives on marriage, and attitudes toward the economy and self-development in the workplace. All the areas of examination concerned in their study take into account the significant presence that the Islamic religion has on all areas of traditional familial life in the UAE. Traditional Islamic societies, the authors state, tend to be more or less uniform in their belief systems toward the female role in society, with a male dominated and patriarchal structure being the norm rather than the exception. As a result, they state, like many communities throughout the Middle East, the role of the Emirati female has been somewhat diminished as compared to that of the male, oftentimes hampering the female’s ability to attain an equal education, have a say in the choice of their husbands, and follow a desired career path in the economy.

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38 Schvaneveldt, Kerpelman, and Schvaneveldt, under “Islam and Gender Roles.”
Regarding education, the authors note that major universities that are funded and maintained by UAE (such as Zayid University) have played significant roles in the increased participation, opportunity, and realization of female higher education. They highlight the global factors of media and commercialism that have given Emirati leaders a cause for concern but also an avenue of diversification away from the oil based economy that will someday run dry. The note that women are to become key players in the future of the nation’s economy as the petrochemical sector plays less and less of an important role and other areas of the economy are given an increased share in the Gulf nation’s economy bottom line. Education of all nationals, female or male, is one of the significant areas of change that must be realized should the economy continue to maintain a level of growth and stability. Quite obviously, this would mean that the traditional place for women in the household is and will continue to be challenged as women find more opportunities to attend graduate and postgraduate educational programs that will take them away from household settings.39

Of course it is one thing to have the education and training and quite the other to actually engage in meaningful or comprehensive employment in any significant matter. The summary of the responses to the questionnaires regarding employment or career goals found that ninety-three percent of daughters wanted to pursue a professional career (outside the home) in their lifetime as compared to roughly the same percentage of mothers that worked only inside the household and had little if any formalized

39 Ibid., under “UAE and Zayed University.”
education. This change in attitude is similarly experienced in attitudes towards the age of marriage and the individual’s say in the partner to be married. In the study, the authors found that the daughters expressed a strong desire to choose their husband as compared to the mothers, many of whom tended to lean toward the traditional notion of selected or arranged marriages that were common in the past. As far as appropriate ages for marriage, many of the younger respondents selected the age of twenty as the appropriate age of marriage while their mothers collectively held a mean age of marriage at the age of sixteen. The authors state that this is a clear departure from cultural and traditional norms of the past perhaps due to their aspirations to hold a meaningful career, place in the economy, and attain a higher level of education.

As part of their analysis, the authors comment on the effects of modernity and especially the forces of commercial globalization:

To study family life in the Emirates and much of the gulf is to work in a setting of rapid and dramatic social change. The super highways, luxury autos, density of cell phones, radio, television, and glitzy shopping malls dominate daily life. The abundant life has come for most and it has been welcomed. The abundant life, however, has come very fast; there was no industrial revolution or gradual development of a production economy. With vast oil resources, life was changed in just a few short years. The young women in this study have not known any other life, but their parents and grandparents have often been in a state of cultural shock as they look out the window of today and clearly remember the world in which they were reared.

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40 Schvaneveldt, Kerpelman, and Schvaneveldt, under “Results.”

41 Ibid., under “Attitudes Toward Marriage.”

42 Schvaneveldt, Kerpelman, and Schvaneveldt, under “Discussion.”
While they certainly point to the modern world that is a reality that has brought itself upon their traditional way of life with little warning, the global and commercial pressures of change have come from the West, namely from the United States. They further note that:

In many ways, these data illustrate not only generational differences between these mothers and daughters, but also a collision of civilizations. It is a mismatch of present and future goals, of present and future hopes, and a conflict of authority in one’s life. Much of this conflict and generational changes deals with who is doing the changing, and often it comes back to the West and more specifically, the United States of America. It would be mostly correct to observe that, at almost all levels of society, change is wanted and welcomed. But, the Islamic nations do not want to be “Westernized” and they are generally resentful towards America for playing such a prominent role in what is seen as Westernization….It seems inevitable that the younger generation will want more of everything that money and education can provide. These include deferment of marriage, choice in mate selection, greater use of birth control and family planning, participation in the workforce and more freedom in everyday life. The generation represented by the mothers in this study is caught between a desert traditional life where things were predictable and a world that is rapidly changing as their daughters grow up with cars, music, TV, cosmetics, and lifestyles that in many ways come out of the West."

The authors note that one of the structural deficiencies in the study is that the actual realizations of the attitudes could not be measured due to the fact that the daughters were not at the point in life where they were in a position to have fulfilled their goals and desires. The authors concede that the outcomes could be very different than the questionnaires may suggest as attitudes and opinions can quickly and easily change with age, experience, and other factors that were not considered. However, it is significant enough, they state, that the attitudes reported are different than the preceding

\[43\] Ibid.
generation, especially among a very traditional society that only recently has experienced the great pressures of change of a modern and global world. They conclude, however, that the role of Islam and many of the traditional and cultural practices that were once held by Islamic communities are still strong and alive today as the commercial and global pressures of modernity continue to make their way into the Emirati familial circle.⁴⁴

That the UAE has become a place where glitz and glamour have brought notoriety to the tiny Gulf nation is without doubt. In fact many of the tourists that visit the Emirates may only see the commercial wealth that is evident in its shopping malls, high-end hotels, lush golf courses, and luxurious town homes and waterfront houses. Many tourists may not even encounter an Emirati while visiting Abu Dhabi or Dubai and may therefore come away with the feeling that the UAE is a place that is void of cultural tradition, history, and heritage. Some may go on one of the very popular desert safaris where the “traditional” life is recreated in a few hours while tourists take in the sights and sounds of the life of the “desert nomad.” However, as many of the authors in the preceding pages have clearly pointed out, there is a very substantial, vibrant, and traditional history and heritage that is uniquely Emirati. This culture has recently faced the pressures of modernity and globalization all at the same time and within roughly half a century. While most elements of Emirati culture have been able to withstand the pressures only to strengthen their bonds, others have succumbed at least in part to

⁴⁴ Schvaneveldt, Kerpelman, and Schvaneveldt, under “Discussion.”
commercial and social realities that have made the nation a wealthy economic regional powerhouse.

What seems to be one of the common elements of cultural change, as outlined in the aforementioned articles, is the willingness of Emirati officials to move away from the more traditional cultural industries in an attempt to create new and diverse industries that go hand in hand with the large tourist market that has recently dominated the economic landscape of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and more recently, some of the smaller northern Emirates. Both Abu Dhabi and Dubai are hoping to take recent initiatives in arts and entertainment and turn them into regional or international destinations for grand art shows and film festivals. However, as previously noted by Hurreiz, traditional cultural industries seem to be alive and well. Sales of herbal medicines and remedies that were available hundreds of years ago are still obtainable on the modern marketplace. Emirati women still purchase gold and other jewelry as they have in the past. While modern architecture and its cutting edge design is visible on the Dubai skyline, the Emirate of Sharjah has adopted a program of integrating modernity with traditional architectural values, in an effort to sustain, promote, and remember the cultural heritage that was one of the few physical vestiges that is still visible on the Emirati landscape.

Another of the common elements of change as noted by many of authors, is the manner in which the status of education, with the particular emphasis on formal and higher education of female pupils, appears to have changed as the Emirates have
modernized and adopted a more worldly approach to structuring their public educational system. While still tied to many of the traditional elements of familial bonds and expectations (as the Al-Sayegh and Schvaneveldt-Kerpelman studies illustrate), females in general sections of the UAE have seemingly been able to progressively and steadily obtain the opportunity and access to higher education and diverse career fields of study and practice. While more than likely tied to modernization, the pressures of globalization probably play an equal if not identical cause of action due to the nature and rapidity of global economic change that has overcome the Emirati social and commercial fabric of the past. That women are still tied to many of the social expectations that have been a part of Emirati society is without question. However, the manner and degree in which these pressures still exert influence over the traditional female familial role is what is being called into question by many of the authors in this study.

While influences and cultural pressures from the West remain strong, political and social decision making authorities appear to remain vested among the patriarchs of the ruling tribal families. This tradition has been passed down from generations and is a truly unique system of governance and order, one that emanates perhaps from the traditional family nucleus and tribal makeup of a larger people that has created the seven federal states of the UAE. As Frank Vogel states, “all the countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council replicate traditional Islamic political and social structures and
practices long after they have disappeared elsewhere…. This observation would seem to point to the larger notion of Arab and Islamic identity as an extremely important and significant component of cultural attitudes and practices. Frauke Heard-Bey similarly notes that:

In the 1990s, after three decades of immigration by foreign experts and labourers have swelled the population figures, the UAE’s society as a whole is anything but homogeneous. However, for nationals, the basic structure of their tribal society has remained intact, even though for some families their changed economic circumstances have dramatically revolutionized many aspects of their lives. Or others, access to modern housing, education and healthcare have made a great difference, but the basic pattern of their lives has not yet changed. Belonging to a well respected local tribe of an influential family is still of prime importance in today’s local society.

While religion, as many of the authors point out, certainly plays a large role in many of the social and political realities that continue to be maintained in the UAE, traditional heritage and historical practices may certainly play an equally significant part in how Emiratis have been able to maintain their basic tribal makeup and national decision making system of governance. Emiratis have seemingly been able to embrace many of the modern luxuries and necessities often brought on by global commercial pressures while maintaining the basic, fundamental, and underlying structures of traditional heritage that have helped make and sustain their unique sense of communal identity and national unity.

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46 Heard-Bey, 270.
An extremely important and significant factor to examine amidst the analysis of how global commercialization has affected the cultural attitudes and realities of the UAE, is the contribution, effect, and impact that foreign labor has brought to the nation. As Heard-Bey notes in the paragraph above, the UAE is most certainly not a homogenous society given its vast influx of foreigners over the last half century. In the following chapter the role of the migrant worker, or expatriate laborer, will be examined in order to gain a better understanding of how and in what manner this vast amount of third-country national labor has contributed to the rapid economic success that has ultimately impacted the cultural heritage and traditional values of the UAE.
CHAPTER III
THE ROLE OF THE EXPATRIATE WORKER

When reviewing the prominent Emirati news website of the Gulf News, it becomes increasingly apparent that the large third country national or expatriate workforce has had an incredible impact on the everyday life in the UAE. While it is true that there are other, prominent Arabic language newspapers in the UAE, the Gulf News is one of the only regularly published English newspapers in the UAE. It’s website is full of articles that are geared not only to the English speaking UAE nationals but to the vast numbers of foreigners that make up the majority of the population in the country. In fact, by examining the website and even the print edition of the Gulf News, one can see that there are separate sections that cater to various segments of society within the Emirates. For example, by viewing the “Resident’s Guide” section of the website, one will find a host of subsections that deal exclusively with expatriate concerns as they relate to working and living in the UAE. One gets the impression that many of these subsections are not geared to cater to the Emirati citizenry.

As mentioned in the introduction of this study, nearly eighty percent of the total population is composed of foreign nationals. That being a demographic fact, it seems as though this enormous foreign population would have to have some sort of impact on the cultural norms and attitudes of the minority population that is the local national citizenry. The large-scale oil wealth has taken the once tiny villages of Abu Dhabi and Dubai and has thrust them into the global market place in under a half-decade. These
two cities, with particular international attention given to Dubai, have managed to
diversify away from the petrochemical industry and have developed new micro
economies that have tended to focus on such areas as the technology, tourism, banking,
and consumer products. Dubai has become a truly multicultural and cosmopolitan city
as a direct result of the development and management of its economic affairs.¹

The cities of Abu Dhabi and Dubai have invested millions if not billions in
research and development programs in such areas as bio-technology (such as the Dubai
Biotechnology Park) and renewable energy resources; a key difference among the UAE
and many of the countries in the Gulf and the greater Middle East and one of the
determiners of what it means to have become a “globalized” economy. These resident
programs foster creativity, commercial competition, and generate advances in key areas
of technological innovation that can give the UAE a comparative edge in business and
commerce.² The cities of Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, and not surprisingly and more
particularly Dubai, have often been compared to other cities that have been said to be
the icons of a truly “globalized” culture such as that of Singapore, which is said to be a
highly developed and structured global city that has met many, if not all, of the
globalization thresholds.³

¹ Abdulkhaleq Abdullah, “The Impact of Globalization on Arab Gulf States,” in Fox, Mourtada-

² Albert Sasson, “Research and Development in the Arab States: the Impact of Globalization,
Facts and Perspectives” (paper presented at the UNESCO Forum on Higher Education, Research and
Knowledge, Rabat, Morocco, May 24-25, 2007).

Singapore and the Cities of the United Arab Emirates,” Journal of Real Estate Portfolio Management 8,
But is it only the economy, the money itself, that has caused millions of people to settle in the UAE or millions more to visit the nation every year? The UAE enjoys a relatively stable political and economic system that, although is new by most standards, has provided for an economy in which many who are willing to move to the area can certainly seek to gain financially. Historically speaking, the nation has pegged its currency, the dirham, to the United States dollar in an effort to promote stability within its own system of currency as well as perhaps making a statement to the region and the rest of the international community as to the loyalties it has toward US market shares. However, this trend was challenged in 2006 as the UAE looked to diversify its currency holdings and move a percentage of them from dollars to euros which was said to be somewhat of a significant change in its future planning, given that the US dollar was weakening against the euro during this timeframe. This shift in policy more than likely relates to the determination of the Emirati financial authorities concerns over the global marketplace and their efforts to maintain economic growth and stability that is has enjoyed over the past fifty years.

Just as maintaining a stable economy with a high demand for labor of all categories would be of concern to governmental authorities, so would it seem to be of great concern to the third country nationals that have helped contribute to the overall

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success of the nation since oil was first discovered and exploited in the 1960s. In fact, it is estimated that nearly eighty percent of the total workforce in the UAE is of Asian ethnicity or nationality, with a large segment of this population serving in employment areas such as construction, landscaping, road maintenance and repair, and other physical type jobs. As a result of their strong reliance on foreign labor (especially the hard labor categories as described above) many of the immigration policies and concerns in the UAE are seemingly more inward rather than outward focused. While most nations have policies designed to keep immigration at bay for the most part, the policies of the UAE tend to allow a steady flow of immigration labor across borders but then have very rigid rules and regulations in place to control and limit the actions of immigrants once inside the country.⁵

The reality seems to be that at the onset the nation could not keep up with the labor demands necessary to advance the country in the direction that Sheikh Zayid and the other rulers hoped to go. At it’s infancy, the UAE simply lacked a national body of experts that were formally educated and trained to take on the responsibilities of administering the type of change that was necessary. While it seems that the national citizenry was able to take on the challenge of placing Emiratis in key positions (and quite obviously successfully), it seems doubtful that they would not have been able to have done so without the steady support of third country national laborers and highly

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⁵ Paul Dresch, “The Place of Strangers in Gulf Society,” in Fox, Mourtada-Sabbah, and al Mutawa, 200-201.
skilled expatriate workers. Since that time, and more recently, the UAE has garnered a new class of Emirati technocrats, many with formalized education from Western nations, who have brought Western concepts (some cultural) back to the UAE. While it is still uncertain what effects, if any, their contributions and influences will have on the traditional leadership styles and commercial management concepts that are more or less widespread among the Emirati population, it provides an indication of the possibility of what type of change could be in store for the future of the UAE.

In his study on the acculturation of third country national (expatriate) workers in the UAE and Gulf, Hamid Atiyyah argues that the dependence on foreign labor will likely continue into the future if the UAE is to maintain its economic stability in subsequent years. As such, he notes, it is important that the Emirati government pay increased attention to the acculturation of expatriate workers into the local community in order to give the nation a better opportunity for increased successes. He states that although many of the Gulf nations have made important strides in increasing the knowledge base, opportunities, and formal education of its nationals, a tremendous supply of foreign labor is still highly sought after given the numerous construction


projects and maintenance activities that make the region function on a daily basis. These laborers fill the gaps of unwanted key infrastructure jobs that are often considered to be somewhat undesirable by local nationals. As such, much of the economic support structure is nearly and entirely composed of third country foreign labor.

Based on historical and traditional precedent, states Atiyyah, those tribes who were of lower social status performed much of the “menial” labor while many of the higher social orders enjoyed more favorable wages and jobs. Therefore, he notes, much of the interaction between the two levels of society was limited at best. In the present day sense then, notes the author, local nationals are not very likely in the near future to accept a change in roles and decide that positions of “manual labor” would somehow become acceptable in the workplace given the social and economic ramifications. As a result, states Atiyyah, nations such as the UAE would be better served to find a way to bring the two segments of society closer together in order to foster a healthy work environment and a relatively content labor class that essentially supports the key areas of society that enable the nation to carry on with its daily life.

In order to do so, Atiyyah believes that certain cultural gaps will have to be bridged in the areas of labor laws, wage determination, and basic living conditions. The

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9 Attiyah, under “Expatriate Employment in Gulf Countries.”
author notes that many of the labor laws (or lack thereof) do not protect some of the basic rights that are found in many countries around the world, in many cases often times resulting in exploitation and abuse by some dishonest employers. In the area of wage determination, Atiyyah states that in the Emirates pay scales are determined by cultural or national status. He notes that the “natives are paid the highest, followed respectively by Americans and Europeans, Arabs, Filipinos, Koreans and, finally, by nationals of countries of the Indian subcontinent.”

In addition to the pay scales that are based on cultural affiliation, many of the employees that are lower on the scale also find themselves living in conditions that are unsanitary and unsafe. The author cites an example whereby many Asian workers in the UAE face conditions in housing arrangements that are breathing grounds for such diseases as malaria and tuberculosis; often times located in housing compounds far outside the cities. He notes that feelings of resentment and frustration are quite common among the “lower” labor classes, given their extreme separation from cultural and social interactions, separation from family, pay inequality, and poor housing standards.

While the so-called “lower” labor categories face extreme hardships of acculturation, the skilled workers and managerial classes face different challenges of cultural integration based on the types of interactions they have in the workplace. In the UAE, all business must have local national sponsorship, oftentimes with local managers in locally owned companies that hold positions above the highly educated and skilled

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10 Atiyyah, under “Work Climate.”

11 Ibid., under “Living Conditions.”
third country expatriate worker. Syed Aziz Anwar notes in his study entitled “Globalisation of Corporate America and its Implications for Management Styles in an Arabian Cultural Context,” that the American model of management has been adapted to satisfy Emirati cultural contexts of employment expectations, goals, and objectives. He draws what are described as “linkages” between cultural decision-making patterns and the manner in which companies are managed in the business world. He makes reference to tribal and communal notions of leadership and how they play a part in the methodology of management styles, even among US businesses that are located in the UAE. He states that:

The Arabian society is relatively higher in collectivism and lower in individualism. Thus, members place more emphasis on the welfare of the tribe, group, or organization relative to realizing individual’s potential. Each tribe, group or organization perceives itself as a well-knit community….in most Arabian companies, personal relationship and tribal ties play an important role in promotions. In the UAE, like many other countries in the Arabian Gulf, concerted efforts are being made to place local personnel in key decision making positions. The compensation packages designed for nationals in several Gulf countries are better than those available for comparable expatriates. Senior expatriate managers are given the role to mentor junior local staff members.12

It is interesting to note here that if what Anwar states is indeed accurate, that although expatriates are equally skilled but paid less, they are often turned to in an effort to “mentor junior local staff members.” It would seem equally interesting then, that although tribal cultural bonds pave the way for promotions and placement into key

positions, the actual on the job training and mentoring would be given to the “outsider” to accomplish.

In addition, Anwar notes that generally speaking, employees in US companies are compensated on performance achieved and documented rather than cultural status or national identity as he has found to be the case among locally run and managed organizations in the UAE. In fact, Anwar states that his study found that a key difference in the management culture among Emirati and American firms is the manner in which the company is structured with regards to leadership and decision-making apparatuses. US firms in the UAE utilize a “top-down” management approach often times focusing their goals and objectives in terms of efficiency, productivity, and job satisfaction. Whereas Emirati firms exhibit tendencies to favor fast promotions of locals into key positions that operate on equal leadership terms and govern the company by consensus in a sort of “flat” organizational makeup. According to Anwar, while American management models have not had a profound effect on Emirati business management culture, there seems to be an increasing willingness to accept and implement US administrative principles and stress efficiency rather than effectiveness.

Anwar’s study is important in that it highlights the potential manner in which culture and identity can profoundly influence the conduct, operation, and success of business and commerce among businesses in the UAE. He concludes that:

\[\text{References}\]

\[13\] Anwar, under “American Culture and Management Styles.”

\[14\] Ibid., under “Management Styles of Arabian and US Organisations.”
It is not uncommon to find western-educated managers in Arabian companies operating in the UAE. It would be easier for western executives to communicate with these personnel. Admittedly, the changing business culture of the UAE reflects, to a great extent, elements of western corporate culture characterised by materialism and individualism. However, it is interesting to observe that although the business culture of the UAE is in transition, the society still retains traditional Islamic and Arabian values. Hence, to be successful in the UAE, western business executives must adapt their management philosophies and styles to suit the Arabian cultural context.\(^\text{15}\)

In following this conclusion and analyzing the findings of Anwar’s study then, it seems apparent that business culture and models in the UAE (at least those that are or strive to be the most successful) adopt a hybrid approach when planning and executing business management strategies. Those companies that only retain older and more traditional decision-making philosophies and notions of promotion by seniority or family affiliation, and reject the basic models of conducting business with Western firms, will most probably not survive in the UAE. It is more than likely the main reason why in 2004, Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, then Dubai’s Crown Prince and Minister of Defense for the UAE, overhauled the manner in which governmental organizations evaluated performance of their employees. He identified the need to change what he called “rigid and outdated management that oppose growth and development,” and cited the necessity to transform the traditional cultural attitudes toward management and

\(^{15}\) Ibid., under “Conclusions and Managerial Implications.”
development and face the challenges imposed by “the new global economic world order.”  

While Mohammed bin Rashid’s comments give a certain transformational spin on what the UAE is trying to achieve, it must still be remembered that there is a large third country national population that would more than likely not be held in the same light as those individuals that bid Rashid is talking about in general. As discussed in the aforementioned pages, this segment of society makes up a great deal of the UAE’s structural fabric of society and of its economic well-being. As has already been stated, it would seem necessary that the local government will have to rely on this abundant source of human capital in order to achieve some of the ambitious economic and commercial projects that have been underway in the UAE since the late 2000s. However, from a cultural context and point of view, one may draw the assumption that to continue to allow for the sustained or even increased influx of foreign labor would accelerate a degradation of local customs, traditions, and heritage. Because of these demographic and economic realities that will more than likely remain unchanged in the near future, there is a strong belief that national identity and local cultural norms could actually be strengthened in the face of global cultural pressures the foreign workforce brings with them from their home countries.  


In fact, the 2008 decline of the world’s economic markets may further contribute to the strengthening of national identity and traditional cultural norms. While it is certain that the role third country nationals play in the key areas of the Emirati workforce (such as police, civil defense, military and construction) will not change drastically, some Emiratis may find solace in the fact that an economic down turn of significant proportions could contribute to the dramatic slowing of foreign immigration. This theoretically, in turn, would allow for the local national population to increase in not only the population ratio, but would potentially allow for placement into other areas of society that they did not have the numbers nor willingness to fill. Of course, it is unlikely that the Emirati national workforce will employ themselves in the hard labor categories that many of the Asian expatriates occupy, but rather they would more than likely be forced to accept employment in other types of employment that require formal education and skilled specialization. The economic crisis of 2008 could therefore, provide for some “cultural breathing room” that certain elements of the nation have long called for amidst the constant and relentless pressures that commercial globalization can have on a society.\(^{18}\) Some segments of the local population have been expressing their displeasure with the foreign populations for quite some time, often blaming expatriates for the increase in crime, the weakening of the moral fabric of society, and for leaning on federal social services.\(^{19}\)


\(^{19}\) Attiyah, under “Cultural Differences.”
That the UAE has come a long way in terms of economic successes is undeniable. It seems that this success can be partially attributed to the support that third country nationals have provided in building and maintaining key components of the UAE’s infrastructure. According to some of the studies that have been examined in this section, expatriates have provided invaluable lessons in business management and program development, a notion that seems to have been vital to the successes of Emirati business firms. Cultural differences, especially in terms of decision-making, certainly play a significant part in how a company and its people will be managed. UAE rulers, such as Mohammed bin Rashid, of Dubai, have acknowledged this reality and have reportedly taken steps in an effort to change the “old” mindset of local business and governmental work performance culture to reflect that of a more global approach to managing efficiency and effectiveness. The commercial business world seems to be the point at which the two cultural worlds first interact; a Western global culture of commercialism intersecting a culture of deeply held traditional and religious values. It is the line that separates the constant and ever changing flow of innovative and progressive ideas, human capital, and cultural identity.
CHAPTER IV

SHEIKH ZAYID AL-NAHYAN

In order to better understand the context in which the pressures of globalization have been operating in since the foundation of the UAE (and even before), it would prove to be most useful to examine the role that Sheikh Zayid Al-Nahyan played in the founding, building, and leading of the nation. Without doing so, it seems that one would not be able to fully appreciate the cultural uniqueness that the UAE embodies amidst the vast culture of a commercial and global world that was introduced to Sheikh Zayid’s homeland nearly forty-five years before his death in 2004. It is said, to know him was to know the people of the UAE, their culture, and their heritage. He was said to be an agrarian, a traditionalist, a statesman, a progressive, and above all, he was proclaimed to be a true visionary leader.

Sheikh Zayid was also said to be the beloved founder of the UAE, an individual that had a vision of collective unity and saw modernity as the way to achieve a unified land that could bring not only prosperity to his people, but education first and foremost. He oversaw a carefully planned movement toward modernization and globalization without loosing sight of the customs and traditions of years past. Before the unification of the federation of states that was little more than a loose community of tribal lands, Zayid, seeing strength in unity, had the challenge of bringing the various tribal leaders to the table in an effort to realize a unified and stronger country that would be in a better position to move ahead in the world; in defense, commerce, tourism, and in education.
To do so, however, required a unique approach to analyzing his potential nation’s people, and their tribal leaders, before formulating a strategy to convince the other sheikhs to unify into one nation. Zayid, having this knowledge, was able to apply the traditional system of tribal decision-making to the political methodology of what was to become the new United Arab Emirates.¹

Realizing that he must honor and incorporate the tradition and historical heritages of his people into the power sharing arrangement of what was to be the UAE, Zayid chose to integrate the tribal system of local leaders into the modern state run institutions. This allowed for the status quo, with all the cultural significance and traditional power arrangements, to go relatively unchanged, while allowing for a contemporary system of governance wherein the country could frame its political institutions, civil departments, military command, and educational centers of research and study. Zayid’s beliefs, upbringing, and experiences in the Bedouin tradition would have no doubt helped him identify with those leaders that he would have had to convince to adopt the new reforms of a federalized government. This was more than likely one of the key reasons for winning their support, as one can only imagine the level of skepticism and doubt that would have been prevalent and widespread among the tribal leaders during that period of time.²

¹ Al-Sayegh, “Diversity in Unity: Political Institutions and Civil Society.”

² The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, With United Strength: H.H. Shaikh Zayid bin Sultan Al-Nahyan (Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates: The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2004), 191-197.
While utilizing an already existing tribal and communal system of interaction among the respective emirates was one of the keys to successfully unifying a nation under cultural terms, it seems that Zayid was also known for his deeply rooted religious beliefs that impressed upon him from a very early age the sense of a strong and tireless work ethic which was to become a part of his leadership style and something that he would have wanted his country to emulate. He was known for being a Bedouin of the desert and of the people, quite literally not afraid to get his hands dirty in building his nation. Zayid was also known to be an agrarian at heart, oftentimes seen tending to date palm trees or other agricultural crops. As such, the issue of the environment and of nature played heavily into his concepts and designs of urban planning, with vast amounts of desert territory filled with irrigated canals that serve to feed the millions of trees that have been planted in many areas of the Emirates. Quite similarly, the UAE can be said to owe much of its culture and heritage to its interactions with the environment given the realities of a desert lifestyle and its seafaring past history.

Pearling, fishing, hunting with the saluki and falcon, harvesting the date palm, and the importance of the camel, all have played a significant role in the UAE’s past and were very often part of Zayid’s lifestyle and are part of what the UAE has preserved in terms of its cultural heritage today.  

Claud Morris similarly describes Sheikh Zayid in his book, *The Desert Falcon*, whereby the author gives the reader a first person account of the interactions and

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3 The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 247.

4 Ibid., 254.
friendship between himself and a young Sheikh Zayid, written during the years of Zayid’s ascent to power and shortly after the unification of the UAE. Morris states that Zayid understood very well the necessity for sustained and stable familial, tribal, regional, and international ties that would keep the bonds of his country together in future years. Morris notes of the ruler, “today, the Zayid we know depends on his family, his tribal and his national strength.” By recognizing the core and fundamental issues that were of importance to his people, Zayid was able to put these foundations to work in the creation of what was to become the UAE. He would utilize his vast knowledge of inter-tribal relations and build upon existing relationships that are still evident today and are a direct result of Zayid’s personal experiences, observations, and adaptations from his own life. The author notes that as a young man, Zayid traveled to Europe and witnessed how “modern” society and all of its technological marvels and benefits could help people; he knew that his country need to move in this direction, the direction of technological advancement and innovation, in order to give his people a better quality of life. Morris states that this philosophy was something that until Zayid’s rise to power, had been rebuked by his elder ruling brother, Sheikh Shakbut.

Morris writes of his faith as follows:

Whenever Sheikh Shakbut visited Cairo, or other capitals, he came back reflecting that the world of Abu Dhabi must remain unchanged. Would his people be as defenseless as other in the history of the Third World before any onslaught of modernism? Where had modernism led some Arab countries – to

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teeming bureaucrats? To American films?...was the right to drink Pepsi-Cola the correct first step in the emancipation of the Arab?\textsuperscript{6}

It is evident that Morris was of the opinion that Zayid’s sibling was unsupportive of significant modernization as modernization would bring about the dangers of the Western world and would set into motion the rival and untrustworthy commercial forces that would threaten the communal, cultural, and religious ties and traditions of his people.\textsuperscript{7}

While it is true that Zayid was deeply religious and led his life primarily through the teachings of Islam, he felt that technological advancement and modernization was not contradictory in any way to the tenets of the religion, which in the early days was not a notion that was as wide spread among his fellow tribal leaders as was the case in many parts of the region.\textsuperscript{8} Morris writes of his faith that:

I now realised I had come face to face with a remarkable individual rooted in faith. He was remarkable in that he wanted nothing. He expressed no aggrandizement. Yet his character, his essential search for harmony and unity through faith, through Islam, had already made its mark much farther afield that the Oasis of Al-Ain where we sat that night.\textsuperscript{9}

Here, Morris refers to the basic personality of Zayid, through which he was able to create a vision of what he wanted his country to become. The author notes that Zayid looked to Islam, peace, and national unity as the guidelines in which to follow to

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 65.
\textsuperscript{7} Morris, 45.
\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{9} Ibid., 86.
achieve this reality, and doing so seemingly without an impression of “aggrandizement”
or of notions of personal gain or national frivolity.

It is said that his personality and character, as Morris noted above, was the
guiding mechanism for how the UAE was to be founded. It seems that his unique
vision for the nation meant unity rather than fragmentation for unity would not have
been solely for political means but was rather something that the tribal leaders would
have bought into, something deeper and more personal than simple political expedience.
There would of course have been many political and economic hurdles that stood in the
way (as was the case), but had Zayid not cultivated the personal relationships based on
his own character, upbringing, and vision for the future, the UAE would have not likely
been formed; at least not in the same manner in which it is today.\textsuperscript{10} It is in this manner
that Zayid appeared to have approached the problem of not only unity but of solidarity
that would last well beyond his years and keep the country unified long after his
influences ceased to remain a bonding element among the tribal leaders of the seven
emirates.

Sheikh Zayid appeared to have planned and executed all his programs and
philosophies with the history, tradition, and culture of his people and country at the
heart of the desired outcome. He put religion, family values, and communal unity at the
forefront of every goal that was to be achieved. It is the manner in which he did so,
through the use of technology and innovation, that most probably sets him aside from

\textsuperscript{10} The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 171.
the rest of the rulers in the region in this regard. He seemed to have realized that with modernization and technological progress would come the potential pressures of commercialization that would serve to water down the cultural significance of his country.\(^\text{11}\) For this reason, Zayid appeared to have been keenly aware of this possibility and he moved carefully and cautiously in an effort to promote modernization through globalization in a manner that served to save the customs and traditions of years past. While he was key in promoting the development of informed consumer public, he was equally as involved in creating programs, organizations, and facilities that were created for the sole purposes of the preservation of cultural heritage.\(^\text{12}\)

The capital city’s Cultural Foundation, for example, was created as one of the first major locations whereby the preservation and promotion of the cultural experience of Abu Dhabi can be observed all in one place. This complex houses historical documents, photographs, and other precious cultural items that are preserved so tourists and citizens alike can visit and learn about the city’s past. Zayid was not only concerned with creating new complexes such as the Foundation, but was also interested in preserving the historic and cultural buildings and mosques that were oftentimes in the way of large construction projects and urban designs. Zayid was said to be firm in this

\(^{11}\) The Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 249.

regard as he did not allow for the demolition of historic structures and instead
demanded the new construction to be built around these significant locations.\(^\text{13}\)

The legacies of Zayid appear to be numerous. He is known for his unique
ability to understand past traditions and customs and use them in the formation and
integration of the building of his nation, thereby interweaving culture, tradition, and
heritage into the very being of the country. His vast knowledge of tribal ruling and
decision making systems appeared to have been key to his successes in bringing the
ruling tribes to the bargaining table in an effort to achieve unification. In fact, in the
brief period following his death, the political landscape of the UAE was anything but
certain, as the nation had only known one ruler. The power sharing composition of the
UAE had been built along tribal lines, with the favored Bani Yas tribe and seat of power
being held in Abu Dhabi.

However, after Zayid’s death, many citizens were afraid of what was to come in
the ensuing months as various factions within the UAE’s tribal community and those
factions within the Bani Yas (within Zayid’s own tribe), looked to gain favor in the
political vacuum that many were afraid would destabilize the country. Due to Zayid’s
foresight, planning, and influence among the tribes, it seems he was able to prepare for
the eventuality of his death, maintain those tribal bonds and relationships that made his
nation succeed, and ensure a smooth and somewhat seamless transition of power. As a

result, the Bani Yas still maintains the presidency of the UAE, has strong bonds with influential tribes all over the nation (which is particularly important with the ruling tribes in Dubai), and remains the cohesive force behind the political, economic, and social stability of the country.  

By helping to create and maintain a stable political system that was based on hundreds of years of cultural interactions, he then introduced commercialism and consumerism into the new nation. His observations and experiences with visiting European nations seems to have played a significant part to his overall structuring or vision of the goals that were set forth for his people. Although he allowed for an unprecedented amount of commercial growth for a tiny population that is the UAE, Sheikh Zayid it seems, understood that he need to combat the pressures of a consumer culture by sustaining, cultivating, and preserving the culture of his people.

Ultimately, it appears that Zayid understood, above all, that the modernization and education of this people would be the real key to significant change. He poured millions of dollars into cultural institutions, centers for higher education, facilities that are geared toward scientific research and development, medical care centers, and numerous other projects that had the sole aim of educating, informing, and bettering his people. By being of the same Bedouin cultural past as the people of the UAE, Zayid was able to garner the experiences of his past and utilize them for the future. By

protecting the same key elements of society that the people of the UAE have been doing for centuries (those values of family, tribe, and community), Zayid was also able to obtain the support and admiration of Emiratis from the time he took the seat of leadership until the time of his death many years later. In a region where religion, tradition, and cultural values play an extremely powerful component of societal bonds, Zayid’s achievements seem to have mirrored those of the UAE. He was able to carefully and successfully balance the pressures of commercial globalization with the social and political realities that makeup the demographic past and present of his people.
ANALYSIS AND CONCLUSION

This study sought to examine the pressures of a highly charged commercial and global world that have been brought to bear on the customs, traditions, and cultural heritage of the people of the UAE. It sought an answer to the question of how the UAE and all of its traditional formations have administered, utilized, repelled, adopted, and marginalized the commercial tendencies that many other nations throughout the world have faced by globalization. After examining the UAE through a cultural methodology, it is apparent that the UAE has effectively managed and coped with the strong and steady forces of commercial globalization without succumbing to the extent that culture, heritage, and tradition have been compromised. There are of course degrees to which globalization has altered and changed Emirati culture, as will be discussed in a moment. However, the cultural indicators of family, society, and governance remain strong, while economic and commercial opportunities have exploded in a frantic and frenzied pace to move the country in a direction that, until the past fifty years, had been thought impossible and improbable.

The United Arab Emirates has been at the cross roads of ancient civilizations for thousands of years, from the Indus Valley to the far reaches of Africa, and has been the gateway by which East and West have connected culturally, economically, and politically.\(^1\) While it may seem as though the rapid accumulation of wealth over the past half-century has made the UAE what it is today, the reality is that the people have

\(^1\) Hurreiz, 10-11.
had a long and substantial history of interconnectedness with other cultures and traditions. This long history has seemingly allowed for Emiratis to appreciate their heritage in a manner that provides for economic and commercial opportunities while protecting their deeply personal and longstanding traditions and customs. Since the 1950s and 1960s, the relationships that had existed for years were broadened as the need for foreign labor rose immensely. Hundreds of thousands of workers poured into the UAE to support demands for upgrades of infrastructure, communications, housing and commercial construction projects, and to exploit the oil that had put the tiny nation on the worldwide economic map. As a result of their presence, new cultural pressures were brought into the nation as their native religions, cultural festivals, culinary preferences, and consumerist lifestyles entered the UAE.

Sheikh Zayid, perhaps with a great understanding of what could and would happen, built his political system in a manner that he thought would keep true to the traditions of his people while allowing for an open commercial platform. This seemed to have depended immensely on his ability to comprehend the traditional Bedouin tribal system of governance, which he ultimately and broadly based his own vision of how the nation was to be unified and stabilized. He concentrated on developing educational institutions and various other projects and facilities that would benefit his people, such as centers for higher education (including stressing female attendance) and cultural foundations to preserve Emirati heritage. These institutions appear to have been deeply implanted by Zayid into the fabric of Emirati society, so that when the global pressures
of consumerism and commercialism were introduced at breakneck speed, the people
and their cultural history would have a chance to survive and prosper among
globalization. While it is hard to determine in this brief study if Zayid forecasted the
rapidity and extent of the global success that the UAE has had in its exploitation of oil,
commerce and banking, tourism and development, and other sectors of the economy, it
seems to be clear that his vision allowed for the opportunity for such a massive course
of events to unfold. He may have not thought of “globalization” as we do today, but
more than likely had an idea of what the “foreign” forces of commercialism (as he had
witnessed on his travels abroad to Europe and other locations) could do to a society that
had yet to modernize in a manner consistent with most of the industrialized world.

In utilizing the “cultural methodology” practice that many of the authors in
Chapter II use in their examinations of globalization, what then does this ultimately
mean for the UAE? Certainly the UAE and its cities of Abu Dhabi and Dubai have
found themselves “globalized” in the traditional economic sense, but what of their
culture? Adopting the various theses possibilities of Chamsy El-Ojeili and Patrick
Hayden, as noted in Chapter II, it appears as if the UAE falls under the “hybridization
theory” whereby certain elements of the culture of commercialism are allowed or
imposed upon the host culture. In this case, the UAE has accepted or at least
acquiesced to various commercial pressures without compromising the basic cultural
structures that make their society uniquely Emirati. While it is true that there are certain
elements that are present under their “homogenization thesis,” such as a significant
amount of US and Western multinational corporations and media firms, Emiratis appear to have successfully adapted to various aspects of globalization that they wanted to be present in their personal and professional lives. It does not seem likely that Emiratis view the US or the other homogenizing Western factors of globalization as “foreign invaders,” or as some have put it “cultural imperialists.” Emiratis appear to have weathered this homogenizing storm as some would claim to be the cause of angst and an attitude of anti-American sentiment. As Judith Caesar notes in Chapter III, American and Western style consumerism has been “superficially” accepted to the extent it does not interfere with Emirati cultural values. Therefore, it does not seem accurate to state that the UAE is best characterized by the “homogenization thesis.”

Likewise, there are polarizing factors that are present, such as the “them vs. us” attitude of the local national toward the expatriate worker (and vice versa) and a general and widespread acknowledgement of the importance of their Emirati identity. It may be the case that the future will hold a different outlook on the importance and necessity of the third country national worker, due in a large part perhaps to the economic meltdown of the financial markets in 2008, however the UAE does not seem likely to immediately move toward a change in its labor policies. It seems evident that expatriate workers have helped make the UAE successful by supporting key infrastructure fields that allowed for the development of the UAE to take place without major interruptions. As the nation exploited its natural oil deposits, vast amounts of laborers were imported into the country to help tap into this lucrative resource. In addition, many workers were
brought into the country in subsequent years to help develop and maintain other
economic markets such as the areas of banking, tourism, real estate development, and
commercial shipping. It seems equally unlikely that the “polarization thesis” best
describes the attitudes and realities that are evident in the UAE given the past reliance
on foreign labor and the future dependency that will have to be in place should the UAE
continue to remain economically successful and politically stable.

Instead, a hybrid of national vs. international, external against internal, and
global in the face of tribal, seems to be the correct manner in which to characterize how
globalization has impacted Emirati culture. Be it through the mechanisms that Chamsy
El-Ojeili and Patrick Hayden describe or those that Vladimir Korobov illustrates, the
UAE appears to be best characterized as a culture that has taken the consumer lifestyle
only so far. As Fox, Mourtada-Sabbah, and al-Mutawa note:

Young Emiratis are especially torn between their more sacred home life, in
which they practice time-honored traditions and speak Arabic, and their more
public life, in which they speak English, eat fast food, drive expensive
automobiles, and engage in commerce. In other words, although the luxurious
life emulates that of the West and is incorporated as public demeanor, it has not
significantly disrupted the basic cosmology and kinship bonding guarded at
home.²

These comments are especially noteworthy in that they capture the basic premise of the
hybridization theory but in reality. Both “cultures” are present, the culture of
commercialism on the one hand and the time honored traditional customs of Emirati
culture on the other. In the UAE, modern luxuries have been welcomed with open

² Fox, Mourtada-Sabbah, and al-Mutawa, “The Arab Gulf Region,” in Fox, Mourtada-Sabbah,
and al-Mutawa, 41.
arms. At first modernization was a necessity, now it seems to be more of a luxury. Nevertheless, modernization is welcomed but only to the point at which it does not encroach on the familial, spiritual, and communal bonds that formulate Emirati cultural norms and societal values.

In applying Fauzi Najjar’s hypothesis regarding the “Arab intellectual” classes, it does not seem the case that the majority of the “intellectual” population has felt a tendency to utterly reject the totality of the circumstances of what globalization has meant to the people of the UAE. To do so would mean the total disregard for advances that have been in education, health care, and the total economic system that has provided a generally higher quality of life for the average citizen than was the case in past years. The UAE, in this regard, appears to have a mix of individuals that either believe the pressures of globalization and all of its commercial pluses and minuses is undeniably inevitable or those that believe they can effectively choose what benefits they want out of a global marketplace and reject those qualities that are not wanted. In either case, it seems as though globalization is perceived as at least providing positive benefits in most cases without disrupting or disregarding the past traditions and cultural heritage of their society. It also appears to be the case that, for the most part, most Emirates feel that their cultural heritage and societal values must be protected first and foremost.

These same values are what Sheikh Zayid had in mind when he developed his vision to unite and lead the UAE. As such, he was able to identify the basic foundation
in which to build the new and fragile country. This foundation would prove to be a critical component of the stable political infrastructure and progressive economy that made the UAE a successful player on the international stage. Many visitors to the UAE might assume that there is “no culture” or a “commercial culture,” as they do not visit the same cultural attractions as in many places in the world, such as churches, art museums, archeological sights, and masterpieces of architecture. Instead, the visitor is bombarded with visions of consumer products, high-end hotels and restaurants, watered down “cultural” desert safaris, and marvels of modern day technological innovation and determination. What they seem to miss, is that the culture is in a large part in the people themselves and not something that is necessarily tangible and physically easy to see and touch. Many of the historical sights have long since been eroded with time and there are not many traditional museums in which to visit, like there are in other parts of the world. However, it seems as though there are certain cultural indicators that are very evident and apparent if one makes an effort to learn more about the culture.

As noted in the preceding chapters, there are numerous cultural industries that have survived the economic and social pressures of globalization. From traditional markets that have been offering herbal remedies for centuries to the highly developed gold market that caters not only to tourists but to a long standing local national clientele that has been buying, selling, and trading gold for many years, the UAE is still holding on to many of the cultural industries that have defined its character. Yet there are new “cultural” industries that have developed over the years as well as a result of
globalization. The petrochemical industry is, of course, the most well known but in recent years the UAE has made an attempt to generate interest in such industries as the Western and Middle Eastern art markets, the tourism and film industries, and the commercial real estate market. These “cultures” of commercialism are present alongside the traditional industries of years past creating a hybrid of consumer culture that is accepted by local nationals.

In the area of education, the UAE has seemingly experienced a vast amount of relative change as a result of the efforts to create and modernize its scholastic institutions. International universities have opened their doors onsite in the UAE as leaders such as Sheikh Zayid and others had acknowledged the importance of higher education and exposure to the international community. Many of the UAE’s “technocrats” and future administrations have been educated in Western universities and are perhaps more in tune than their predecessors with respect to what new opportunities and pitfalls globalization can bring to the Emirates. Attendance in institutions of higher education is up across the country, especially in among female attendees which is a notable departure from the days before modernization and globalization swept across the country. There are new opportunities for females to follow a course of study that could take them into new careers paths that have never before been held by females before them. However, there appears to remain a cultural stigma of actually taking up a career in such non-traditional sectors (such as teaching) although the education opportunities to pursue such a career are available. In this case,
the global pressures have brought about change insofar as the educational opportunity is concerned, while the reality of many female Emiratis of actually being able to take up various careers remains to be seen.

While the cultural cohesiveness of the UAE has certainly been tested ever since the world commercial markets began to import its oil in the middle half of the twentieth century, the future influences of globalization will more than likely continue to exert an enormous amount pressure on Emirati heritage. Given the findings of this study, it should be expected that the UAE will continue to maintain a hybrid status between its traditional culture and that of a commercial and consumerist culture. Familial patterns should be expected to remain the constant denominator in the stability and status quo of traditional Emirati culture. Tribal decision-making structures and relationships that have played such an important role in the past are to be expected to maintain their significant place in the administration of affairs and the management of the commercial pressures that are to be allowed into the country. Likewise, the legacies of Sheikh Zayid are to be expected to remain more or less intact as the values and traditions that he stood for are those same values that are deeply rooted in the people of the UAE. While rulers of the Bani Yas will more than likely continue to lead the nation, at least in the near future, they will do so most probably in the image of their tribal leader that helped them achieve the successes of the past and has given them the tools to achieve equally as much in the future.
As was stated in previous chapters, the 2008 downturn of the global marketplace may cause some sectors of the domestic economy to turn to privatization or “Emiratization” of their workforce thereby increasing the number of Emiratis into some sectors of the economy that they have never experienced. This could have the effect of bolstering and increasing the sense of their cultural identity at the detriment of the expatriate populations that currently makeup the vast majority of the workforce. However, by and large, the country will have to continue to rely on the third country national workers and they will continue to remain exposed to all the cultural nuances that these expatriates bring to their host nation. The UAE and its citizenry will, as it appears to have always done, continue work harmoniously amongst foreign cultures for hundreds of years at the same crossroads that once connected them to the far reaches of East and West. It appears as if the UAE has been able to import the global conveniences and necessities of modernity and globalization but has done so through a traditional lens, never taking their eye of what is important in their lives. While it is true that as a nation they have experienced the accumulation of wealth at unprecedented levels, it does not have appeared to make a significant impact on the societal values of family, tribe, community, religion, and identity that have made the nation what it is today.
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