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From Total Dependency to Corporatisation: The Journey of Domestic Work in the UAE

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Abstract

Migrant domestic work has played complex, dynamic, and multilevel roles in the evolution of families, and the corporatisation of domestic work across the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, particularly the United Arab Emirates (UAE). With the increasing globalisation process in the UAE, migrant domestic work has not only deepened families' critical dependency towards domestic work, but also influenced the state's logic to institutionalise reforms to control, govern, and corporatise domestic works sector in recent years. Using primary and secondary literature sources, this article examines the historical and contemporary evolution of migrant domestic work in the UAE and of the GCC region. It argues that the UAE's domestic work sector has historically transformed from informally structured sector—heavily dependent on the sponsorship of local family structures—to emerging corporatised sector across the UAE labour market. This article presents empirical and theoretical contributions because it highlights the evolving corporatised approach of the state in managing and governing domestic work and its impacts on local family structures in the UAE.

Keywords: *migrant domestic work; UAE state; dependency; corporatisation.*

Introduction

As a young nation-state in a globalised world, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has quickly achieved massive, unmatched socioeconomic growth and advancement in the last half century. The UAE, a federation of seven Emirates, comprising *Abu Dhabi*, *Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Um-al-Quwain, Ras al-Khaimah*, and *al-Fujairah*, has transformed from a minor area on the edge of the historical record with limited basic human amenities to becoming an emerging, influential state actor globally (Abdulla 2006). Built on the fortuitous bounty of fossil fuels, the UAE became officially established to unify the governing seven local emirates only nine years after its first oil export, which helped accelerate the UAE economy, society, and labour markets. This has enabled the government to directly support local families' employment and social welfare, transforming the UAE's narrative from total poverty and subsistence living into a modern Cinderella-esque arc of affluence (El Mallakh 1981) (locals and non-locals) (Al Fahim 2006).

As globalisation has shaped mainstream UAE society, it has continued to maintain its tribal family structures, a central unit of society (Heard Bey 2004; Al Sharekh 2007), Acted as a fundamental building block that forms society and its prevailing social structure, the UAE family constitutes the very basis of survival of the culture. While the extended family unit also reinforces and expands the functioning and existence of society. Without these strong cultural and family ties

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embedded in the families within the complex social structure, the harshness of the existence in the UAE—especially during the pre-oil discovery period—could not have been structurally sustained. Although the basic notion of "family" in the Emirati context remains central to the very core of the nation's fundamental architecture, the nature of the "family" in the UAE has gone through a series of major changes on a variety of levels (Al-Tarrah 2007) with the advent of wealth and modernity. These specific tangible shifts are largely rooted in multiple and complex social, economic, and political factors that converged to trigger dramatic transformations among local families in the UAE. One of the least anticipated—but most influential—factors in the rapid societal changes in the UAE is the massive influx of Asian and African migrant domestic workers—regulated by governments and facilitated by transnational recruitment agencies—into Emirati households (Sabban 2012a). The arrival of migrant domestic workers accelerated the shift from traditional subsistence living in the UAE and influenced local Emirati households to adapt to more modern conveniences in a global context. Thus, the global migrant emergence and integration of migrant domestic workers into UAE households has profoundly reconfigured the contemporary formation of household structures, cultures, and practices in contemporary Emirati society.

This paper examines the historical and contemporary evolution of migrant domestic work in the UAE. It argues that that the UAE's domestic work sector has historically transformed from informally structured sector—heavily dependent from local family structures—to emerging corporatised sector across the UAE labour market. This paper holds empirical and theoretical contributions because it highlights the evolving corporatised approach of the state in managing and governing domestic work and its impacts on local family structures in the UAE. The study is divided into five key sections. First, I examine the early foundations and the causes of modern migrant domestic work in the UAE. Second, I explore the contemporary structure of the UAE migrant domestic work and its growing corporatisation of the migrant domestic work in the UAE and its evolving role in mainstream UAE society. Third, I dissect the critical costs of migrant domestic work on mainstream UAE society, specifically on local UAE families. Fourth, I explore the growing corporatisation of the migrant domestic work in the UAE and its evolving role in mainstream UAE society. And lastly, I conclude by highlighting future insights on the future role of domestic work in the contemporary formation and continuing dependency of local UAE families on migrant domestic work sector in the UAE.

The Early Years: Historical Foundations

Prior to the state formation of the UAE in 1971, this small corner of the Arabian GCC Peninsula, which consisted of a number of overlapping territories that varied geographically from winding coast to expansive dunes and sprawling mountains, was modestly inhabited by a mixture of Arab tribes, some of whom were nomadic Bedouin and from the surrounding regions, and mostly from India, Iran, and among others. As Table 1 indicates, in the early 1900s, the local population was estimated at no more than 80,000 individuals (Heard-Bey 2001), and the population gradually increased until the oil discovery period, when the local population exploded in response to high international migration of various migrant workers, including domestic workers, into the country (Sabban 2012a).

Table 1. Population Growth and Composition in the uae since 1900

Year	Total	Nationals (%)	Expatriates (%)
1900	80,000	Not available	Not available
1958	86,000	Not available	Not available
1968	180,000	114,000 (63)	66,000 (37)
1975	557,000	201,000 (36)	356,000 (64)
1977	862,000	215,000 (25)	647,000 (75)
1978	950,000	222,000 (23)	787,000 (77)
1979	1,015,000	228,000 (22)	787,000 (78)
1992*	2,012,000	580,000 (29)	1,433,000 (71)
1995	2,411,041	587,330 (24)	1,823,711 (76)
2000*	2,623,000	762,000 (29)	1,861,000 (71)
2005	4,106,427	825,495 (20)	3,280,932 (80)
2010**	8,264,070	947,997 (11.5)	7,316,073 (88.5)
2018***	9,560,748	956,075 (10)	8,604,673 (90)

The local inhabitants heavily relied on the few meagre resources, and considerable ingenuity, to survive the hostile climate in the UAE. As Heard-Bey acknowledges,

> "They [local populations] had developed the means to make all aspects of their seemingly inhospitable environment work for them. Management of these economic resources was harmonised with an age-old social structure producing unique socio-economic responses to the rigors of life in the eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula" (Heard-Bey 2001)

The above-mentioned "rigours" principally included an absence of basic infrastructures, including roads, schools, hospitals, skilled professionals (that is, doctors, nurses, and engineers), and domestic workers, who were historically considered to be a rare luxury (Heard-Bey 2001). Formal education in the UAE was also neither readily available nor fully accessible to the entire local population (Al Faris 2000), excluding some of the traditional Qur'anic schools and the very few primary schools that were established in the mid-twentieth century (Al Faris 2000; Soffan 1980). As a result, the illiteracy rate exceeded 90 per cent prior to the formation of the UAE (El Mallakh 1981). Moreover, until the 1950s and 1960s, many of the local inhabitants lived in a variety of simple dwellings from goat hair tents and houses made of palm fronds (locally known as '*arish*) or, in some cases, modest constructions made of coral stone with "an upper floor and even an ornate wind tower for comfort during the hot summer months" (Heard-Bey 2001). They also used to live clusters and extended families, and their mode of living has helped families and women sustain itself (Sabban, 2012). Thus, the early historical formation period in the UAE was clearly marked by socioeconomic underdevelopment, and the dependency on foreign migrant workers—specifically

migrant domestic work—appears to have been little or almost absent among early local families within mainstream UAE society.

In addition, the local tribal system also played a pivotal role in shaping the local community for centuries, and strengthened the very structure of their society. On an individual level, "tribal 'belonging' is far more reassuring than the comforts of 'home' and the sense of security, which is paramount for people whose social structures are associated with the land they live on" (Heard-Bey 2001). In this particular social system, the family unit was considered to be a fundamental social building block for sustaining all facets of life in mainstream UAE society, ranging from the economy to the political community. The overarching family system provided an embedded structure to maintain the tribal connections and reinforced the complex social roles that eventually shaped the formation of household structures among local families.

In addition, extended family members lived either in the same household as their kin or in close proximity to each other (Sabban 2012a). In fact, local families would help each other in their daily tasks, such as caring for family and children, in times of difficulty or during significant events, including giving birth[2] or falling sick. Additionally, UAE households and families were more directly integrated into the local domestic economy. In the pearl diving era (a vital and high risk means of living before the decline of natural pearls worldwide[3]), men would leave their families for more than three months for employment and would migrate outside of their local communities in order to make the most of the pearling season. During these absences, women were mainly in charge not only the domestic sphere but also of the subsistence economy, making clothing and food, and building houses that were made of palm leaves and/or tents made of processed animal skins or hand-woven fabrics (Al Sayegh 2001; Heard-Bey 2004). The existence of gender-specific roles within local UAE society was not only deeply structured and embedded but also played an integral role in sustaining both the local culture and household structures. However, during this time, women carried much of the burden of domestic duties, ranging from the arts of weaving fishing nets and dyeing the palm leaves used extensively both inside and outside of the domestic arena to caring for animals, along with the more typically associated tasks, such as child rearing and food storage and preparation (Al Sayegh 2001; Heard-Bey 2004). Women, in particular, played a critical role in the overall survival of the local family because "the need to alternate between various economic activities placed great responsibilities on the women during the long periods of time that men were obliged to be away from home" and, therefore, a woman's "contribution earned her a high status in society, and a husband's reputation and honour rested on the conduct of his wife and daughters" (Heard-Bey 2004). These gender-specific social roles therefore configured and defined the local domestic norms, practices, and values among UAE households, reaffirming the critical value of domestic work duties in building the local family, society, and nation.

The gender segregation roles embedded in local households helped to reinforce the early notion and importance of domestic work activities within UAE society (Sabban, 2018). In fact, although hired domestic help or, in some cases, slavery played a role within the local culture, it was often the exclusive reserve of affluent merchant families; therefore, domestic work had little or no impact at all on local households. To an extent, the concept of domestic help from non-family members was

[2] Family, friends, and neighbors would support the mother until she regained her strength and was able to return to normal activities. Variations of this practice are still evident among Emirati families today.

[3] Cultured pearls emerged during the 1930s and effectively destroyed the pearling industry that had sustained the local populace and much of the economy for centuries, leaving behind a vacuum that would not be filled until the discovery of oil; this development left the already tenuous subsistence living in disarray.

not a ubiquitous feature of daily life; yet it has recently been observed across every social class, nationality, and family structure across the country. As the country has moved from an aggregate of loosely connected Emirate states to the unified UAE state, this particular concept has eventually transformed the collective understanding that has long lived with the UAE national women.[4]

The Causes of Domestic Transformation

With the discovery of oil, the UAE began to reform its territorial emirate borders and transform into the vibrant cosmopolitan federation that now exists. With the rapid modernisation process, combined with the massive influx of economic wealth and investments in the country's infrastructure, the UAE economy and society quickly transformed. This transformation process initially began with the sudden population growth, as new employment opportunities and the ensuing manpower shortage for building required modern infrastructure helped to create a demand for all types of foreign workers, including domestic workers. More specifically, this particular era shifted the UAE from a subsistence-based economy to one that relied almost exclusively on oil production to thrive, both at the regional and global levels. The following paragraphs highlight how oil wealth helped restructure and transform the nature of UAE society:

With the advent of oil, the Emirates began to "break regional—even international—records in urban development and fast economic growth" (Sabban 2012a). As the UAE embraced the tangible benefits of globalisation, the UAE's economic rankings also increased, to attain one of the highest per capita gross domestic products in the world and the second highest ranking in the region after Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Economy 2016). From an economic standpoint, the dramatic economic shift of the UAE, to an extent, has led to the marginalisation of Emirati families, moving them away from the national economy and their former central role in the mobilisation of labor. Traditional means of employment such as "subsistence agriculture, nomadic animal husbandry, the extracting of pearls and the trade in pearls, fishing, and seafaring" (Shihab 2001) became obsolete or were transferred to imported foreign migrant workers, as the economy diversified and Emiratis began to take on less manual forms of labor. In particular, local UAE nationals began to take on positions that conformed to more westernised concepts of employment, with typical five-day workweeks, eight-hour workdays, and regular salaries. This economic transition and prosperity has eventually created a division:

> "A two-tier labour market has emerged in the UAE. At the top is the indigenous labour force, which constitutes about 10 per cent of the total work force. Below this is an unlimited supply of foreign labour. The UAE has reaped benefits from foreign skilled and unskilled workers, who initiated its economic development in the early 1970s and subsequently have come to sustain it" (Shihab 2001)

[4] During of the author's fieldwork in the summer of 1993, she interviewed 34 Emirati women who employed domestic workers. Of these, 33 highly praised the value of domestic work because the institution provided an element of social value and afforded the women the opportunity to engage in society. Interestingly, none of the informants—even two decades after the establishment of the federation—felt there was a contradiction between defining their roles in the domestic sphere as the core of their social status and then transferring said related domestic tasks to other, non-Emirati women. This response provides a curious contrast to the long-standing conceptualization and feminist critique of domestic work as a devalued commodity in the market system on which the modern economy is based. "Domestic work has long been the site of contestation since the advent of industrialization, modernization, and women's participation in the work sphere. Domestic work engenders gender tension, class exploitation, and racial manipulation. It has historically been the terrain of domestic violence of different shapes and levels" (Sabban 2014a). For more information, see: Enloe 1990; Jayakody at al. 2008; Mitchel 1974; Oakley 1974; Scott 1986; Smith 1973.

In order to increase national employment in the labor force, women were encouraged and incentivised to participate in the evolving domestic economy, as newer industries were established. The pro-nationalisation policies of the UAE government have increased female labour force participation and integrated them into the modernised workforce in ever increasing capacities, thereby creating a further need for change in the organisation of the domestic sphere. In other words, the UAE government's economic strategy enabled local UAE populations to obtain formalised employment status and increased women's labour market participation, which, to a large extent, drove the labour demand for the domestic work sector to address the growing domestic care deficit within local households.

Although women were still the main responsible figures in the households and families, many factors played important roles in encouraging the importation of domestic workers from abroad, which, in the mid-1980s, became a well-established government immigration system. The *Hareem*[5] system of hierarchy, which had provided support for the young and old within the family for generations by dividing domestic duties among female members of the household,[6] with newly wed woman at the bottom of the hierarchy. Despite the major changes that engulfed the society, UAE women continued to perform the main domestic responsibilities. Although domestic workers started becoming more visible in some families and were taking the place of the newly wed females, they began to accumulate more wealth and participate in the labour market. The prevailing structure of the extended family played a role in both necessitating and sustaining the move into larger, more modernised homes in organised neighbourhoods. However, even as local families started moving out of the existing extended family structure, they continued to support and rely on one another in order to maintain the local culture, customs, and traditional practices.. As new wealth had brought on more responsibilities, families eventually adapted to a more modernised life style by slowly integrating domestic work services to effectively create more efficient household systems (Sabban 2012a; 2014). As daily life in the Emirates became more modern, urbanised, and globalised, the internal structure of local families' households started shifting toward a more nuclear form, and the move to larger modern residences ensured that the employment of domestic workers would inevitably become an imperative option to survive in the contemporary period.

In addition, the (in)dependence[7] period in the 1980s could be potentially viewed as the first period of actual "modernisation" for the family in the UAE and its subsequent metamorphosis from the strictly extended to broadly nuclear (El Haddad 2003; Crabtree 2007; Sabban 2012a). Although the new nuclear families still held strong cultural connections with their extended families by living in close proximity and providing them with multiple forms of domestic help and support, the actual physical and domestic work support lessened or, in some cases, even disappeared in most local households (El Haddad 2003; Sabban 2012a; 2012b). In fact, migrant domestic workers started playing their new household roles and eased the transition of daily life into that of modernity and material wellbeing for entire local families. For newlywed couples or the nuclear family, this new social order provided them with a greater amount of independence and autonomy from the large extended family than had been previously possible, while allowing them to accumulate ample time

[5] In this context, *Hareem* (literally, women) refers to the matriarchal system that functioned as the support network among Emirati women, which was, and remains, a major social organizational force. This should not be confused with the *Harem*, that is, the wives and concubines of rulers in the imagined and lived Arab and Islamic world.

[6] The senior matriarch was responsible for the kitchen and other major household decisions; the younger members were provided with lesser tasks to achieve the smooth running of the household.

[7] It is independence for the newly rising nuclear family from the previous structure of the extended family, whereas it is a new form of dependence on domestic workers, which will mark a major transformation in the society.

and space to participate in the labour market, attend social gatherings, initiate entrepreneurial activities, and other related leisure activities. This independence from the local and traditional structure turned out to be a new form of dependence on foreign domestics. The adoption of migrant domestic help enabled families to remain connected with their social relations (that is, extended family, friends, etc.), because they had more time to visit, exchange food, and enjoy quality time with their extended family; they could easily employ domestic workers to do the household work that would have traditionally consumed much of a woman's day (Sabban 2014a; 2014b). Because of the growing dependence on and importance of domestic workers in local UAE households, women were inevitably criticised, particularly in both the English and Arabic[8] media, as the shift to heavy dependence on domestic service became more publicly widespread. These criticisms of women relying on domestic staff to seemingly carry all previous domestic responsibilities and child care[9] arose in both public and private discourse because many perceived such dependency as a form of cultural abandonment of the traditional and cultural women's roles in local UAE society (Khalaf 1987; Khalifa 1986). In other words, the growing dependence on migrant domestic workers was not only viewed as a direct threat—either actual or perceived—to the established cultural domestic norms but also as a negative factor in sustaining women's cultural identity as domestic carriers and protectors (as mothers) of the local culture and nation.

The influx of economic investment has also enabled the state's "revenues to finance huge programs for governmental spending, maintain a huge number of governmental employees, and support the prices of energy, water and other services for their citizens" (Ministry of Economy 2016), while simultaneously providing "the government with the opportunity to undertake ambitious economic development programs" (Faris 1994). The transformative economic shift has also empowered the state to increase its political capacity and reaffirm its domestic sovereign power to govern the local populations. Although such measures were established to improve the quality of living for all inhabitants, nationals were generously provided with certain exclusive benefits (Abu Baker 1995). For example, education in public schools was free for nationals and certain non-national government employees. Public schools initially provided free food, clothing, books, and even allowances for children to encourage all parents to send their children to school. Nationals were awarded fellowships to study abroad to further improve the country's human capital supply, in line with the strategy to establish a knowledge-based economy. Non-Arabic speaking expatriates were given land and allowances to establish their own schools and other community facilities (Davidson 2005). Health care was also guaranteed for all, as the "the UAE Government's health policies aim at providing a range of facilities and at implementing programmes aimed at advancing the level of service and health education throughout the UAE" (Shihab, 2001). Another major consequence of the state's policies also provided Emiratis with land and building allowances—in the form of interest-free mortgages or loans—to construct their homes, especially among the newly educated populations.[10] The state's generous support encouraged the small society to grow and

[8] In a previous study with Moors et al., I have analyzed the differences in the discourses and media portrayals of the heavy reliance on domestic workers. Curiously, in the English media, the issue often focused on domestic workers' rights (or lack thereof) and their positions as victims, whereas the Arabic media focused on the negative impact of domestics on the family unit (Moors et al. 2009: 167). Women were singled out in such reports, both directly and indirectly, and burdened with the portrayal of being lacking and inadequate in their household roles and responsibilities.

[9] One of the other main concerns was the impact of domestic workers on the language of children and other types of cultural erosion that might arise from leaving children in the care of nannies (UAE MOWSA 1990).

[10] Most houses that are built are villas that vary in style and size according to the individual family's financial capacities; they often feature a garden surrounding the villa with high walls and greenery for privacy. Of course, not all nationals are able to own villas

provided young small nuclear families, especially the newlyweds, with more power and autonomy than the earlier, much stricter patriarchal extended family (Sabban 2012a). Therefore, the UAE state's accumulation of wealth did not only subtly play a role in transforming local families' collective wealth but also consequently helped to accelerate the reconfiguration of local households' structure, lifestyle practices, and cultural dependence on migrant domestic work in the contemporary period.

The greatest change of all for the newly formed UAE occurred as the population dramatically increased in size and changed in composition as a result of the major structural transformations that followed the economic boom and rapid urbanisation in the country. Prior to the UAE's formation, the whole population did not—as was established earlier[11]—exceed more than a hundred thousand people. These numbers began to grow suddenly in 1973 with the advent of oil and the establishment of the state, almost doubling to one hundred and eighty thousand (El Mallakh 1981). Furthermore, the population of the Emirates[12] during those early years still consisted mainly of inhabitants local to the region, who formed some 63 per cent of the populace whereas expatriates formed the remaining 37 per cent (Sabban 2012a). This demographic trend reversed completely within the following decade; between 1958 and 2000, the total population in the UAE quickly increased from 86,000 to 2,623,000, whereby expatriate populations accounted for 71% of the total UAE population. The local population, however, only represented 29% and has ever since been largely outnumbered by the expatriate population, even in the contemporary period. An independent think-tank organisation, the Gulf Labour Markets and Migration (GLMM) Population Program estimated that, in 2016, the expatriate population largely dominated the overall UAE population, representing 91% of the total population, whereas the local population has increasingly become a minority. Given the decreasing fertility rate in the UAE, the share of the local population against the total UAE population is projected to decrease in the long run. This new demographic trend certainly created an exponential market demand for domestic workers, and importing/recruiting agencies bloomed as newspapers carried advertisements daily. The employment of domestic workers as cooks, maids, and drivers was easy, cheap, and accessible (Sabban 2012a, 2012b). The cyclical nature of this upsurge ensured that the population would continue to increase and the need for domestic workers would remain firmly in place. As a result, almost all families—both national and non-national—employed domestic help in some capacity, depending on their level of income, ease, and accessibility (Sabban 2012a; 2012b).

Initially, given the historical ties and the long-term relationship between India and the coastal region of the Gulf and the UAE, most migrant domestic workers employed in the Emirates were from the South Asian region. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, for example, male Indian domestic workers were the most ubiquitous domestic help in many local UAE households (Moors et al. 2009). However, while some families would continue to employ male domestic workers from India, the market started changing very quickly, and soon domestic workers arrived from Indonesia,[13] Sri Lanka, and the Philippines. These three nationalities were treated with some hierarchy that dictated

due to their circumstances. Lower income families live in smaller houses with a small yard, in neighborhoods where houses were built by the government and provided to underprivileged nationals, among them widowed or divorced mothers unsupported by their husbands (Sabban 2012a). Non-nationals often reside in designated neighborhoods and/or working compounds that are owned by the companies that employ them. Construction workers and lower income workers also live in their own clusters known as "labor camps" (Khalaf 2006; Gardner 2011).

[11] See Table 4-1.

[12] Based on estimates from the 1960s.

[13] Those from Indonesia were particularly encouraged because of the country's Muslim status (see Silvey 2006; 2007)

the roles[14] that they would occupy and the salaries that were expected (Ghubash 1986; Khalifa 1986; Khalaf et al. 1987; Sabban 2012b). Domestic service—which is currently considered a common and essential feature of daily life—also encouraged the state to begin to ease the relevant domestic market regulations and, thereby, facilitating the importation of domestic workers, in order to ease the living of all inhabitants, particularly national families (Kapiszewski 1999; Shah 2009). The rate of dependency on domestic workers among nationals in particular reached 2.2 domestic workers per family by the mid-1990s (UAE MOWSA 1990; Sabban 2012a; 2012b), and more recently, the ratio of domestic workers per local family had increased to 3.5 in 2014 (Sabban 2012a). Thus, the growing dependence on migrant domestic work was not only a product of a state-led policy initiative but was also influenced by global social, economic, and political factors that triggered the influx of migrant domestic workers and their integration into local UAE households.

The Cost of Change: Consequences for Emirati Society

In the contemporary UAE period, the accumulation and distribution of oil wealth have certainly played a critical role for positioning the UAE at the centre of the world economy in terms of modernity and wealth (Sabban 2013; Hannieh 2011). It has also particularly functioned as a powerful force responsible for the shaping of the modern UAE family and society that exists today and, most importantly, the ensuing demand for migrant domestic work. The aspiration and determination of the country and its inhabitants to embrace global modernity in this era of globalisation thus cannot be underestimated. Dubai, in particular, is the most obvious embodiment of such ambitions because the city has embraced the task of moulding itself into a global brand[15] and initiating world-record megastructure projects, such as Palm Island. The global branding strategy of Dubai has ricocheted through the country and the wider region (Abdulla 2006; Krane 2009; Barret 2010) and has further shaped the UAE family and society, in a way, by embodying domestic service as part of a modernised attempt to symbolise and signal wealth and adaptation in a global context (Sabban 2012b; 2014a).

Although there are no official government data published on domestic worker populations in the UAE, recent estimates suggest that the current number of domestic workers has risen to approximately 800,000 (excluding those unregistered "illegal" or "unaccounted for" workers who remain in the country).[16] The heavy reliance on domestic workers is now de-rigueur among most local UAE families and, in the case of the many women, who opt to work and establish a presence in the public sphere, migrant domestic work is deemed to be a necessary tool to create a smooth, well-functioning family unit. Basically, local households in the UAE cannot function without support staff. The number of domestics per family has risen considerably to 3.5 per family, and domestic work has become much more professionalised with clearer roles for cleaning, cooking, child-care, elderly-care, driving, and gardening, among other duties (Sabban 2014a, 2014b). In a recent survey of 400 local families in the UAE, I found that 95% of families acknowledged their inability to survive without any form of migrant domestic help within their households (Sabban 2014a). Of course, not all Emirati families have migrant domestic workers, either through choice or by

[14] For example, household cooks—an institution in their own right in many large households—were often Indian, or in some cases Iranian, because of the expectations of their kitchen knowledge and local palates, whereas domestic workers from the Philippines were employed as household servants and nannies. Interestingly, domestic workers from the Philippines were also a sign of status for UAE families and women (Sabban, 2012b) because they were considered to be more modern and, therefore, more capable of helping the family in its shift to modernity.

[15] With projects like the tallest hotel (The Burj Khalifa) and the biggest mall in the region (The Dubai Mall).

[16] Multiple amnesties have been issued by the UAE government in attempts to resolve such issues over the decades, and no publicly available government data estimates are available (Fargues et.al 2015).

limitation of means. Less than 2 per cent of families are still striving to survive without domestic workers; however, these families are the exception to the general rule and are largely difficult to access for research purposes (Sabban 2014a). Additionally, Emirati families employ not all migrant domestic workers in the UAE; in fact, statistically speaking, a larger proportion of domestic workers are to be found in non-national households (Sabban 2012b). Many of the diverse expatriate families that now reside in the UAE hire domestic workers from their own community.[17]

Corporatisation of the UAE's Domestic Work Sector

After the passage of the UAE Federal Law No. 10 (2017), the state has increasingly institutionalised the domestic work sector by regulating and governing the recruitment and placement procedures of migrant domestic work in the UAE. The law stipulates the 19 different types of domestic workers operationally offered to local and expatriate households seeking domestic workers within their households or private facility premises. These diverse categories of domestic workers include housemaid, sailor, security guard, shepherd, jockey, tamer, falcon caretaker, worker, housekeeper, cook, nanny, gardener, private coach, private teacher, farmer, private nurse, private representative, private agricultural engineer, and family driver. These skill categorisations simply reflect the growing state attempt to professionalise domestic work. In governing and managing these newly developed categories, the UAE state has formed the Tadbeer Center, a multipurpose public-private-partnership (PPP) recruitment centre based in the UAE, which has recently become a symbol of 'corporate' approach in facilitating the recruitment and placement processes for domestic work. Governed and monitored by the UAE government, the Tadbeer centres are operationally monitored by the UAE state, as well as governed and managed by the private sector, strategically forming the private-public partnership (PPP) approach of the UAE government vis a vis the governing private sector.

As Tadbeer centres increasingly emerged in UAE society, Tadbeer centres thus operationally exist in Dubai and Abu Dhabi only, covering all the demand requests for domestic work across the UAE domestic work sector. The place of three Tadbeer centres in Dubai and nine Tadbeer centres in Abu Dhabi reflect the strategic and vital needs of local and expatriate families, as well as the high concentration of migrant domestic work' demand within the UAE, seeking migrant domestic workers for their households or private facility areas in the UAE. These centres, in fact, facilitate all various services, including recruitment, placement, upskilling training at all levels, counselling, dispute resolution process and certification process, workers' orientation process for both employers and workers. While these particular functions, especially dispute resolution, have been particularly governed by the local and origin states in the past, the UAE Federal Law No.10 now empowers the private sector to govern and corporatise the domestic work sector in order to effectively manage the labour interests of the local employers in the domestic labour market.

In addition, the Tadbeer centres have also become categorised and privatised, displaying the levels, nationality types, and capacities of domestic workers in various levels, skills, and pricing systems. In fact, in contrast to the narrow definition of domestic work prior to the passage of the Federal Law No. 10 in 2017, the Tadbeer centres under the new law have now reclassified

[17] The Indian community of the middle and upper middle class will hire Indian domestics, and the Filipino population will hire domestics from the Philippines. In the case of European expats, families will hire from a diverse range of backgrounds, whereas expatriate Arabs (Egyptians, Jordanians, Syrians, Lebanese, etc.) hire from all other available nationalities in the market, such as Filipino, Indonesian, Ethiopian, Bangladeshi, etc.

19categories of migrant domestic work, highlighting the various hierarchies and capital cost requirements for potential employers. The 'matching process' employed within the Tadbeer centres reflect the market demand and supply across the spectrum in the origin and destination countries, as well as the growing corporatism framed under the public-private partnership (PPP) between the state and the private sector in the domestic worker sector. To an extent, this new governance approach to migrant domestic work signifies the growing and, to an extent, evolving regulatory role of the state in controlling and managing the migrant domestic work flows within the country.

As domestic work sector becomes corporatised in the UAE, the culture of dependency among employers has also subtly evolving and deepening. When the deployment of Filipina domestic workers to the UAE, along with Indonesia and Ethiopia, was banned by the Philippine state in August 2014 and until now, the private sector (recruitment/placement agencies) tremendously suffered loss, while employers struggled to identify and meet their 'preferred" care worker demand for their children, household, and other related demands. To respond to such regulatory blockage, UAE-based placement firms have opened multiple cleaning companies like "Supermaids" and "Dubai cleaners" readily available online, particularly in Dubai, offering highly individualised, part-time, and in some cases, seasonal cleaning services to the households, mostly expatriate households in the UAE. While local UAE households alternatively moved to prefer other nationalities, others, to a certain extent, have continued to use part-time domestic workers to perform mostly basic household functions, including cleaning, cooking, and childrearing for families.

On the other hand, expatriate families have increasingly relied on part-time cleaning workers who perform cleaning either daily or multiple times depending on the business requests or the actual needs of the employers. This new form of domestic work service transaction in the private market has, in fact, emerged in response to the ongoing blockade of migrant domestic work from the Philippines, Indonesia, and Ethiopia which simultaneously reinforces the 'ethnicised' preferences for certain domestic workers in the UAE labour market. Although most of their employer contracts and sponsors are now under the governing private sector, their critical functions mainly revolve around domestic work, thus symbolically reflecting the changing structure and functions of highly corporatised domestic work in the private sector.

Moreover, Filipinos, Indians, and more recently African domestic workers, providing various cleaning services to households, hotels, facilities, and other special events surrounding the hospitality and tourist sectors in the UAE, mostly dominate the domestic workers/cleaners. They have also become the new category of domestic work publicly visible in the UAE, operating in the public setting while other domestic workers, especially those who live-in domestic workers, have remained to an extent "invisible" in the public eye. While the ethnic preference for live-in domestic work on the basis of stereotypes has continued, the growing privatisation of invisibility of domestic work acting cleaners, reflect the visible market corporatism of the UAE domestic work sector.

The growing visibility/invisibility of migrant domestic work has also remained vital in understanding the changing and dynamic accommodation patterns of migrant domestic work in the UAE, particularly in Dubai. While live-in domestic workers reside within the local families, domestic work/cleaners, however, have become integrated in the public, whereby the employers often rent cheap accommodations for migrant domestic workers in various migrant towns in Dubai to accommodate their basic living accommodation needs. The glowingly colourful uniforms—often coded in blue, red, orange and green—signify the public categorisation and visible corporatised approach of private sector firms that accommodate and advertise migrant domestic

work across the UAE. To a large extent, the strategic placement of migrant domestic work accommodation, combined with the color and skill coding reflected in uniform colors, reflect the converging push to the emerging visibility and complexity of the UAE's migrant domestic work sector.

The Cost of Change: Consequences for Emirati Society

In mainstream Emirati society, the local populations have found themselves in a paradoxical situation where, on the one hand,

> "…the basic structure of their tribal society has remained intact, even though for some families their changed economic circumstances have dramatically revolutionised many aspects of their lives. For others, access to modern housing, education and healthcare have made a great difference, but the basic pattern of their lives has not yet changed" (Heard-Bey 2001).

On the other hand, the combination of the transformation of the economy, the many functional developments that society has witnessed, the demographic imbalance due to migration, and government policies have facilitated transformations that have contributed to the change and reconfiguration of domestic life in the UAE. The conflicting position that was brought forth by modernity and globalisation has, ultimately, also resulted in a number of costs and consequences that have inevitably placed the traditional Emirati family in the UAE in the midst of a number of serious dilemmas in several respects:

Increased Domestic Work Dependence

Perhaps the most obvious and often decried outcome of the rise in migrant domestic services has been the greater dependence on domestic workers in contemporary UAE households. Emirati women, given the central role they are often deemed to play in the transference of tradition and identity to future generations, are subject to much of the burden of domestic responsibility for the real and perceived impact of domestic service. Young Emirati women are today reaping the fruits of increased government attention and appointments in positions as ministers and ambassadors[18] and in senior government posts. The more achievement women gain in public life, the higher their dependency on domestic help is in private. An entire generation of Emiratis has, in fact, been raised without the domestic skills that were once transferred through practice and observation of daily activities. The extended family structure that once allowed for domestic work to be shared amongst family members no longer directly serves as the main source of support or cultural/traditional knowledge transfer in the specific area of household chores and duties among UAE households.

Culture Clash and National Identity

[18] Certain behavior, such as travelling alone or working in mixed environments, was formerly considered unseemly for respectable Emirati women. In this area, there has also been a change in attitude among the wider local populace, particularly in recent years as the success of UAE women, particularly the younger generations, has become a huge source of pride for many families. The change has, however, been much more gradual as a friend of the author's who works in the diplomatic corps explained. The woman stated that, in choosing a career in public service that would require extensive travel and relocation, she took steps that were met with disapproval by her family, particularly her father. However, with perseverance, success, and the support of government initiatives for women to play a greater role in the public sphere, the woman observed that her father, who had initially rejected her first appointment in the diplomatic field, was now her biggest supporter and openly expressed his fatherly pride in seeing his daughter achieving such success. Needless to say, professional women today, married or single, have domestic workers who support them at home in order to continue in their public roles.

Emiratis are now grappling with the tension that constantly arises between tradition, heritage, and globalisation. Everything from the native Arabic language to local food and traditional dress, such as the *abaya* (a long thin black gown to cover the inner clothes) and *sheila* (a thin black head scarf) for women or the *kandora* (a long white dress) and *ghatra* (a white head cover with a black circle to keep it from moving) for men, is being observed much more loosely by the younger generations and is being negotiated as the society adapts and reinterprets global influences. Tension over national identity and personal behaviour is creating significant generation gaps (Khalaf 2005) as Emirati families adapt to changes. The serious issue of identity is becoming more apparent in society as a result (Sabban 2013; 2014a). In particular, an increasing concern among Emirati and other Gulf-based families centres on the influence of migrant domestic workers on local children's values, identity, and behaviours as they need to sustain the very family/population with the drop of fertility rate (Roumani 2005; Sabban, 2018).

Substantial Demographic Imbalance[19]

The UAE annually attracts millions of visitors and foreign workers, who substantially reinforce the demographic imbalance dilemma in the country. The inhabitants have recently reached an astonishing 10 million individuals according to Amin Al Amiri, Assistant Undersecretary, Public Health Policy and License Sector, Ministry of Health,[20] a startling population boom in so short a period. However, the massive influx of foreign migrant workers has created a dramatic demographic imbalance that has turned Emiratis into a minority. This has caused alarm among some members of the community, who fear that society and tradition is being irreparably lost through the increase in globalisation. These signs are worrying to those nationals who are open in spirit to the world but who are, through circumstance, surrounded by non-nationals in every capacity (Abdulla 2006; Sabban 2013; Malit et al. 2018) and who now have to face the sociocultural impacts that such exchanges have played on the development of the social fabric in mainstream UAE society.

Private and Public Human Rights Abuses

The preceding 20 years of this decade was fraught with private and public complaints of human rights abuses against domestic workers in the UAE. Research from the turn of the millennium studying from a legal and social framework, the status of female domestic work is rife with cases of abuse, both physical and psychological (Sabban 2002; Begum 2014). Fieldwork in discussion with 51 foreign female domestic workers in two time frames (1995 and 2001) in the UAE brought to light a number of difficulties faced by these women in the country. These range from emotional difficulties to language barriers; however, most pertinent to this conversation are the narratives on working conditions at the time. Isolation was found to be a primary cause of suffering for these women, who at the time were at not considered as part of the labour force. As these women were under total control of their sponsors, and had no legal rights, and were expected to remain socially separated, it created an ideal atmosphere of unreprimanded abuse. Wages and working hours were unregulated and a main concern.

[19] In the mid-1990s, the government began taking measures to regulate expat workers because the numbers were rising rapidly. One new regulation that affected domestic workers was to exclude the low-skilled earners from bringing any of their family members along (Sabban 2012b). This law also meant that, even in cases where the employer might allow them to do so, domestic workers were legally prohibited from forming their families in the country, which thus created a 'conditionality' based form of integration within mainstream UAE society (Malit et al. 2018). The introduction of a new government quota on the import of domestic workers by both nationals and non-nationals, along with a mandatory security deposit that was required for each domestic worker employed and that would be returned on termination, was also implemented in an attempt to steady the demographic imbalance (Sabban 2012b).

[20] See Cornwell (2015).

In terms of verbal abuse, the following was reported from a sample of the participants:

> "They say Indian, knows nothing." Another respondent stated, "My employer is a nervous person. She always make us feel that we are her maids." A third respondent said, "They shout, they scream at me, they call me names, they make me feel as if I am like *kashra* or trash."A fourth foreign female domestic worker recalled, "They say you are an animal, a donkey, crazy, stupid (Sabban 2002, 28)."

Physical and sexual abuse was noted too, by several participants, and remains a problem, that at the very least, is being addressed today. On physical abuse, participants said:

> "Once I hit my employer's car by accident. She started screaming at me. "Don't you see? Is it the first time you see a car? Why are you so stupid?" She was wearing a ring. She smacked my face. My face was red for a long time. I cannot forget this moment." A second foreign female domestic worker related, "Once we were in the kitchen. I was cooking, [and] she got angry with me, after we got in an argument. She hit me with a plate (ibid, 29)."

Sexual abuse and harassment were cited by the participants, and the data seemed to paint archetypes of the perpetrators. It was generally cited that 'elder men' or 'other male workers' in the household would be the reprobates of the attacks. A more recent report from the Human Rights Watch (2014) issued similar findings in addition to a number of recommendations to the United Arab Emirates government. Due to continuous findings of this nature in the still-young nation, local and international pressure begins to mount. In turn, the government takes local initiatives, discussed below, as well as international initiatives to repair their damaged image. This includes becoming signatories to Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and its Protocols, amongst others (Sabban Forthcoming). Other changes at a local level include a 2017's domestic workers rights bill (Kanso 2017). The issue was no longer solely of human rights abuses but of a flawed infrastructure and a damaged public image.

Triggered Change and Current Results

Domestic work in the UAE has been subject to a fair amount of scrutiny from a human rights standpoint as issues related to labour abuse, exploitation, and neglect have increasingly become more apparent in an economy where foreign migrant labour is the very means by which the transformation of UAE cities (mostly Dubai and Abu Dhabi) into global forces has been possible. As such, domestic work regulations have increased in the UAE to protect both the family and domestic workers from unethical and illegal practices committed by agencies. As a result, local families have also felt under pressure to address these issues too, and they are constantly being subjected to criticism by international labour and rights groups, both in social media and in public life. Laws and regulations are continually evolving to ensure that labour and human rights violations and exploitations are eradicated; however, the process is one that requires a considerable amount of organisation and regulation, which puts the country under increased pressure in terms of the protection of labour rights and treatment of domestic workers (Fernandez and De Regt 2014, see also Ishii, Chapter 5). Recently, for example, the UAE Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization (UAE MOHRE) passed a new domestic law that guarantees labour rights (that is, living conditions, working conditions, salary, etc.) and increases workers' access to dispute resolution mechanisms in an attempt to bolster their access to legal justice in the UAE. The UAE MOHRE's Domestic Work Department has also created at least 30 Tadbeer offices—a centralised recruitment, placement, and domestic work training agency--across the country in order to systematically

regulate the recruitment of migrant domestic work both here and abroad. Therefore, the labour and human rights issues embedded in the context of migrant domestic work narratives have not only triggered and impacted on the "branding consciousness" of the uae but have also constructively influenced local families to rethink the complex issues of labour and human rights, as well as their domestic legal responsibilities and rights to protect their image and avoid major repercussions for the country's global standing.

Conclusion

The UAE has certainly achieved unparalleled socioeconomic growth and development in recent decades, while simultaneously continuing to exhibit strong determination to set its sights firmly on the future, as codified under the UAE 2030 vision plan. In the age of mass globalisation, as the UAE continues to engage with modernity and globalising forces, local UAE families and society are dramatically evolving, posing more complex and critical threats to their local culture, national identity, and security. One critical consequence of globalisation on the UAE family is the inevitable and, to a large extent, long-term dependence on migrant domestic work. Although the fertility rate is declining in the UAE, the heavy dependency on migrant domestic workers continues to grow. Although some families view domestic work as an inevitable tool to embrace modernity and globalisation and as a signaling factor to convey wealth and social status, other UAE families view it as an imperative domestic support that is needed to create an efficient local household structure.

As local UAE families' dependency on migrant domestic work increases, the consequences and costs on local UAE families and society also deepen in the long run. Many of these sociocultural challenges are rooted in the rapid social transformation after the discovery of oil, which has created a unique environment where the presence of domestic help is one of the most contentious and apparent outcomes of this dramatic economic transformation. More importantly, it is noteworthy that migrant domestic service has deeply impacted on the fundamental nature, structure, and culture of the Emirati family, which is deemed to be the very core of this exceptionally private and traditional culture. The evolution of the family unit in the Emirates as a result of the reliance on domestic help has also resulted in a unique set of complex labour and human rights issues and challenges that are a constant part of the discourse in the public and private spheres in the mainstream UAE community. The causes and consequences of these challenges, and the concerns themselves, are not only complex and unpredictable, but as the current situation stands, it is not clear if there is a "one size fits all" solution to the sociocultural conflicts that subtly impact on the local household cultures, structures, and practices. The speed of the complex social, economic, and cultural change and the constant imposition of migration as a development strategy reflects not only the uniqueness of the UAE families' dilemma but also the achievements of the UAE's brilliant ability to move from living in the shadow of history to becoming a young, successful nation-state globally. The cost, however, of such economic transformation on local UAE families' structure, culture, and traditions has many complex and multiple repercussions that may come with an "invisible" tomorrow in the long run.

Moreover, given the dominance of domestic work sector in the UAE, the evolving reconfiguration of domestic work sector critically reflects the growing corporatised approach to domestic work sector in the UAE. It also displays the emerging social visibility of the 'invisible' labour sector, as we as the shifting responsibility from the state to the private sector in their attempt to control and govern the holistic dimensions of transnational migrant domestic work industry. Therefore, it is essential to conclude that the domestic work will remain high and market driven

sector, as the governing state continues to devise institutional and policy reforms to govern and corporatise its sector in the long run.

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