Review Article

Gender, faith, and education: A study of five Muslim women in the United Arab Emirates as they struggled to overcome gender social and religious prejudices

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the remarkable accomplishments of five women managers in higher education settings in the United Arab Emirates from pre school to graduate studies abroad. The paper uses the exegetes of Imam Izadi to lay out in uncompromising terms prescriptions which form the background to a righteous Muslim woman. These prescriptions had the effect of drawing a circumference beyond which the girl child could not compete with a boy child. From illiterate parents and poverty stricken villages (except one) but nurturing families, their journeys to successful academic careers were remarkable. As they met obstacles from within and without, they drew within themselves resilience and determination. The article adopts a critical feminist approach, drawing on available literature for comparisons. In conclusion, the question arises whether they are sui generis, or whether they can be regarded as pioneering gender role models.

Keywords: Remarkable, Accomplishments, Uncompromising, Poverty stricken, Insecurity

INTRODUCTION

Since the creation of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 1972, the government has pursued a policy of inclusion of women in the workplace. Using a method of narrative analysis, this paper looks at the roles of gender, faith, education, and family background among five Emirati women managers in U.A.E. Higher Education (H.E.) settings. In their journey to top management positions, these women met cultural, patriarchal, and religious barriers. The paper considers whether their success was entirely due to government policies or whether their own efforts played a part.

A critical feminist perspective is situated at the heart. Kincheloe and McLaren, a critical theorist, would use their work as a form of social or cultural criticism, assuming that

- All thought is fundamentally mediated by socially and historically constructed power relations.

- That facts should never be isolated from values or moved from some inscriptions.
- The relationship between concept and object, signifier and signified is never stable or fixed and often mediated by social and capitalistic relations of production and consumption.
- Language is central to how subjectivity is formed (in terms of both conscious and unconscious awareness).
- And certain groups in any society are privileged over others. Although the reasons why may vary, the oppression that characterizes contemporary societies is forcefully produced when subordinates accept their social status as natural, necessary, or inevitable.
- Oppression has many faces: That which focuses on only one at others' expense often ignores the interconnections between them; Mainstream research practices are generally, albeit most unwittingly, implicated in system re production.

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The narrative analysis covers four key themes: gender; family background; access to education; and the Islamic faith. The testimony of the five women gives recommendations for policymakers and the private sector: Encourages strategic exchange programs; and increasing female involvement in high value executive positions.

Background

In the Arab world and throughout Middle Eastern culture, gender, faith and family background are intricately intertwined, define, and predict performance and lifestyles. Religious influence is pervasive throughout [1]. The impact of Islamic influence is pervasive throughout and is reflected in human behavior, social interactions, and relations [2]. Progressive Islamic exegetes support integration of women in the workforce, including their right to higher education while placing emphasis on the importance of family and their role as mothers [3]. Furthermore, Islam continues to exert a strong influence on organizational philosophies, policies, and practices in the Middle East [4]. The combination of religion and nationalism has influenced people's "sense of belonging, political lifestyle, and communal cohesion", thereby creating a sense of patriotism among the population [5]. As much as Islamic tradition, as defined by conservative or progressive exegetes, is at the heart of defining the role of women.

According to progressive scholars such as Safi Omid a contextual re interpretation of Islamic tradition, women have played major roles in all occupations, exercising authority as religious scholars, teachers, and leaders. Sutayta Al Mahamati of Baghdad (d 891) was a distinguished mathematician, and jurist, specializing in inheritance share laws, and a doer of charitable deeds. Contemporaries deferred to her judgments, she even issuing fatwas (order to shun) against evil doers. Lebanese May Ziyada was a writer and thinker who called for renewal and revival in intellectual thought and a change in societal attitudes towards women and their activities. Syrian physicist, Shadia Rifai Habbal obtained distinction and prominence in Physics, specializing in the study of wind and solar movements. Moroccan Fatima Mernissi was a pioneering internationalist feminist writer and social scientist.

These examples highlight the activities which Arab women have undertaken, placing themselves at the forefront of intellectual development. Intellectual emancipation helped shape these voices; yet have Emirati women and girls are ignorant of their achievements. Several Muslim countries have also produced female Heads of State and Prime Ministers: Among them, Benazir Bhutto (Pakistan); Mame Madior Boye (Senegal); Tansu Ciller (Turkey); Kaqusha Jashari (Kosovo); and Megawati Sukarnoputri (Indonesia).

It is significant that none of these leaders emerged from the Middle East or from the states making up the Gulf Cooperation Council (G.C.C.). Despite past intellectual achievements described above, marginalization of women in religious and secular institutions became formalized. Informal authority which educated Arab women had hitherto enjoyed was lost (Ibid). Above all, women's freedoms in the Gulf still depend on the will of men [6]. Thus, traditional roles and responsibilities are still linked both to patriarchal beliefs and practices, as interpreted by conservative exegetes. These will be discussed in more detail below.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the introduction of free education in the UAE, women have made remarkable progress. Madsen and Cook note that most female Emirati college students are first generation attendees, with relatively uneducated mothers who married in their early teenage years. According to Dr Maitha Al Shamsi, minister of state for education, Emirati women are a significant factor in the nation's growth and development, making up 66 percent of the government workforce, with 30 percent in senior decision making positions. They also occupy 15 percent of the senior management positions in the army, police, and customs. Statistics in higher education were not [7].

There are specific government initiatives aimed at promoting women's empowerment. Government has sponsored training for women managers. Further, business achievers such as Sheikha Lubna Bint Khalid Al Qasimi, Salma Hareb, and others, have received awards for achievements for excellence. A key goal of the Abu Dhabi economics vision 2030 is the support and integration of women in all public and private sectors of the economy.

However, lack of women in leadership roles in general can be attributed to widespread negative stereotypes associated with gender and leadership images. As a result, personal and organizational barriers exist, which prevent women from advancing in their specific fields. To address this, the U.A.E. leadership supported the growth of women's education [8]. This encompasses a free primary, secondary, and tertiary public education system, which enables women of diverse socio-economic status and familial circumstances to access higher education. As a result, there are more females in tertiary institutions than there are men [9].

Yet with boys enjoying more post-secondary employment opportunities than girls, girls have tended to opt for higher education, making careers in education an alternative. As Sheikha Lubna, the minister of economy, and planning for higher education, put it in 2007, women are encouraged to be "flexible in their approach to work to choose a career path, to balance the demands of home, and the office, to contribute to the development of this nation."

More recently, having recognized the country's women as equal partners in national development, the government has continued to pursue a strategy of empowering them within cultural, social, and economic fields [10]. The policy of empowerment was started by Sheikha Fatima bint Mubaraki, Chairwoman of the General Women's Union (G.W.U.), Supreme Chairperson of the Family Development Foundation (F.D.F.) and President of the Arab Women Organization (A.W.O.). Speaking at the 2009 national day, Sheikh Fatima declared that: "Under a wise leadership that believes that investing in people is the most valuable form of investment, we are confident that U.A.E. women will continue to be successful. It is enough to say that U.A.E. women are no longer busy claiming their rights but exercising them."

The success of such female empowerment can be seen in the political sphere as well. By 2010, four women sat in the country's cabinet; nine of 40 members of the Federal national council (parliament) were female, giving women more legislative representation than any other country in the Gulf. Two were

ambassadors. Approximately 15 percent of teaching staff at U.A.E. university were female; while women also held 60 percent of the jobs in medicine, pharmaceuticals, and nursing.

In May 2015, the government set up the UAE gender balance council. The council has overseen the implementation of best practices and processes: Ensuring that federal institutions achieve their gender balance targets, as part of a vision for the country to become one of the world's top 25 countries for gender equality by 2021. It conducts several functions, including reviewing legislation, policies, and programs to achieve gender balance in the workplace.

Emirati women have also performed a key role in the modernization process through women's associations. These have laid the foundations to train women in vocational courses; provide welfare aid and job placements.
Despite these efforts, the belief that women should not be exposed to men still is widespread, inhibiting women from taking up jobs in fields like tourism that expose them to men. Public schools and universities are still segregated according to gender. Public universities have high levels of police presence that ensures separation of males from females. In some universities, female's guardians are notified every time they enter and leave campus. Therefore, while the increase in female leaders signifies a higher level of integration in the public sphere, social structures continue to maintain gender restrictions largely to the disadvantage of women.

Gender

Gallant, Gallant and Pounder, Madichie, and Madichie and Gallant all underscore the importance of the expectations placed on women in the Arab world, and that women themselves want to conform to what society expects of them. The expectations of women to be wives and mothers are still highly pervasive. In any case, despite recent advances, very few women can be found in senior management positions in the U.A.E. In line with the government's vision to advance gender equality and women's empowerment across various sectors, the Ministry of the economy and gender balance council agreed to strengthen training collaboration efforts that enhance women's economic participation, entrepreneurship, but left out the higher education leadership and management component. The literature available on women in management in the Middle East tends to focus on career barriers and challenges for females in supervisory roles in middle management positions. Madsen; Jamali, Sidani, and Safieddine; Kattara; and Metcalfe all highlight this. Barriers tend to involve coded, unwritten social mores rooted within a patriarchal, male dominated society. The Sharia-based personal status law regulates matters such as marriage, divorce, and child custody. While many research projects and publications on gender related issues in the
UAE, have been published, none have looked at educational management in higher education institutions. Assaad examined gender issues from an economic rather than higher educational perspective. Ridge; Abdulla; and Abdulla and Ridge focused on contradictions steeped in traditional, religious, cultural, and patriarchal beliefs, but made no contribution to the question of whether women have access to positions of authority in higher educational institutions. Ridge notes a gender gap which shows that only 27 percent of males attend higher education compared

with over 70 percent of females. In his view, young men do not go ahead into higher education because of family obligations and the desire to find work. Perceived low economic returns from education constitute a major factor too. However, the policies mentioned above have also contributed to the high proportion of young women in higher education. A survey of the participation and contribution of women in academia reveals that they have achieved and contributed a great deal too intellectual and cultural life in the Arab world: Despite what Ghubash refers to as "ways in which women were caught in the problematic interactions of thought and patriarchal policies."

According to Delamont and Duffin, society should not ignore the context in which certain beliefs and practices are held. Beliefs about sex roles and education affect the ways girls view higher education. Despite the large body of research that documents the existence of serious gender inequalities in education, health, economic and political participation in the Arab world, few initiatives exist to address the issues. Regional policymakers have faced the problem emanating from the fact that most research on education has been undertaken mostly outside the Middle East and may be riddled with western biases. Issues surrounding access for researchers have contributed to this continuing imbalance; and in the absence of policies and solutions based on locally derived research, the U.A.E and the Gulf states will continue to fail to address their own distinct educational needs.

The lack of locally based research is of particular importance. Local research "gives insights, shows nuances, and reveals gaps not identified by large cross cultural studies." Sustainable solutions to educational challenges in the region require policy decisions based on local realities rather than international opinion. Assaad, in her comprehensive study on gender issues found that the UAE was lagging, being ranked number 105 of 128 countries, although it does have a highly competitive economy. Less than one third of Emirati women were in the middle and senior management positions, with the potential to raise to senior roles. A wider gender gap existed in technical managerial positions; only 8 percent having reached middle or senior positions. Clearly, then, the gender gap identified here is wide enough to warrant further investigation, especially in terms of higher education leadership.

Yet research on gender roles over the last two decades appears to lean towards a universal trend of increased liberalism, and an acceptance of a more 'egalitarian role definition'. This is indicative of a paradigm shift in so called traditional roles for women: Not only in the UAE, but the Middle East more generally, as more and more women take up employment outside the home. However, Arab societies are still reluctant to abandon traditional expectations. From such a standpoint, they consider household and domestic activities as especially suitable for women: to the extent of prioritizing education of boys rather than girls. That said, on the more positive side, despite the challenges faced across the region in addressing women's empowerment and their contribution to the civil, political, and intellectual arenas, women in G.C.C. countries are entering higher education sectors in greater numbers; even making up most graduates.
Many factors influence women's careers and their progression into management positions. These include family and cultural context, significant others, professional considerations, and

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competencies. In research covering both public and private companies in the Middle East and North Africa (M.E.N.A.) region, Kemp, Madsen and El-Saidi established that women are still under represented in senior and leadership positions. A "patriarchal contract", whereby tradition assigns the role of family provision to the menfolk, is based on perceived gender strengths and weaknesses. Culturally, women find themselves assigned the roles of nurturers, caregivers, and homemakers, men as leaders and breadwinners. This attitude extends to organizational hierarchies: Thus, women find themselves excluded from managerial positions. There is evidence, though, that this mindset is more prevalent among the older generation. The World Bank has found that women from Arab societies mostly work in social services.

The same can be said of the UAE. Studies conducted in Egypt on male attitudes towards women revealed negativity linked to women managers and those in managerial and leadership positions, as well as patriarchal attitudes reinforcing traditional values. On the brighter side, a similar study in Kuwait showed a relatively positive attitude towards women managers.

Family

Traditionally, women in the UAE have always assumed greater amounts of responsibility in house management but they find it difficult to combine careers outside the home with family duties. Such assumptions and expectations have led to Arab women occupying roles regarded as extensions of their roles in the family, such as elementary school teachers, secretaries, and nurses. Attitudes and expectations of female family members appear based largely on the views of their loved ones. For most women, family holds a central position in their lives, greatly influences their choice of career and the pace of progress. Male prejudice is plainer among the middle classes; here, emotional help and encouragement are central to a woman's career development.

Yet family including male support appears more readily available to females from upper class and ruling families. These women receive support and advice on career choices, and opportunities for employment thanks to wastes: Powerful social networks which acknowledge tribal and familial structures. Those women who enjoy access to these networks do nonetheless acknowledge the barriers and prejudices faced by their less fortunate counterparts. For all women, however, the key point remains the reconciling of their roles within the family, expected within an Islamic culture, with the personal commitment required to gain the competencies necessary for management positions. Their study choices dictate not only employment potential, but their subsequent level within the organizational hierarchy.

Research also confirms that women encounter difficulties in maintaining a career while having a family. Traditional gender roles still commonly discourage women from seeking employment outside the home. Madsen; Jamali, Sidani, and Safieddine; Kattara; and Metcalfe all highlight the many barriers and challenges facing women as they seek to progress into leadership and management positions. These tend to involve coded, unwritten social mores rooted within a patriarchal, male dominated society. By law, Emirati women require permission from a man (either their father or husband) to take up employment.

Mustafa research revealed that some progressive corporations in the U.A.E. were willing to open management portfolios to women. He, however, emphasized that this was not a generalized movement away from a "patriarchal and traditional society." In other words, symbolic domination is still leading to the reproduction and re contextualization of historically coded elements of gender (e.g., women as "housewives.") little opposition exists to the traditional expectations noted here. Women managers are themselves of the view that, while they can aspire and have the potential to reach the highest management positions, their primary concern and role as women should center and revolve around the family. Gallant and Pounder, Madichie, and Madichie and Gallan, underscore the importance of feminine self-expectations and conformity in the Arab world; that no woman voluntarily admits to not wanting to become a wife or mother.

Faith

Ultimately, it is impossible to separate religion and culture in the Arab context; the two are intertwined and combine to make up the way of life itself. Islam encourages equal education for men and women, as well as women seeking to work outside their home, although their priority is to their familial roles. However, Gallant and Pounder claim that the Quran has many examples of support for feminine liberty, but that conservatives Imams have reinterpreted it, after the death of the prophet, to silence women. Law was reframed by men to exclude women's opinions. The values of patriarchal hegemony were injected into the hadith (tradition) in the post prophetic period. The "reluctance to abandon traditional caretaker roles of women in Arab societies" has exacerbated the position of women.

According to Rizzo, Meyer, and Ali, although changing dynamics in Arab states have led to women being afforded some rights, different states use either conservative or progressive interpretations of the Quran to suit whatever policies they are pursuing. There is a tendency to limit the rights of women in areas which include political participation, corporate roles, marriage, inheritance laws and divorce.

Further orthodox Islamic exegetes on the role of women do not approve of any liberalization. Rather, these conservative exegetes have pursued "a relentless male oriented ideology, which tends to assign privilege and power to the male at the expense of the female". However, patriarchal power relations are being challenged. Progressives argue that women are themselves unaware of rights which exist under Islam: Which does not prohibit them from holding positions of authority. Kausar shows that there is a growing number of "women friendly interpretations of the Koran and Muslim teachings." Yet widely held religious views about the position of women continue to form barriers to their progress into management.

Gallant and Pounder in their examination of the relationship between Arab feminism and post structuralism theory, affirm the movement towards a more liberal interpretation of Islam. However, in resisting liberalization, conservative Imams argue that feminism has its roots in the west and is therefore foreign to Islam.

These views will be discussed further in a more detailed analysis on how they have come to shape universities today. Indeed, the conviction exists amongst many young women that western concept of feminism has no place in the Arab world; and that women must therefore employ other means to obtain an equal

place in society.

Methodology

Narrative analysis informs feminist research methodologies in different ways, as it incorporates both values and beliefs. These distinguish feminist research from traditional research methodologies. The former opens the field of questions which are considered significant, changes the choice of and interaction with participants, and alters the implementation of data collection and analysis.

Feminist research

Following Horkheimer and the Frankfurt school of thought, feminist research challenges the researcher to face significant questions, without "laying down rigid political demands. It is a central tenet of critical thought that the process of liberation entails a process of self-emancipation". It changes the choice of and interaction with participants and alters the implementation of data collection and analysis. The constructivist paradigm assumes a subjectivist epistemology and, by necessity, has different criteria for evaluating research to the usual ones of internal and external validity, reliability, and objectivity. Feminist theory and critical theory are known to share common assumptions in respect of their underlying epistemologies, yet their histories reflect crucial differences. Feminist researchers initially focused on the absence of women's voices in male generated reports on women. Later, feminist researchers, concerned with ethical issues focused their criticisms on the validity of research and assumptions central to the positivist paradigm.

Feminists used critical theory to question the role of logical positivism, which is the objectification of human experience. It also challenges the traditional binary perspectives of positivistic science such as "the knower and the known, the researcher and the researched, the scientific expert and the practitioner." According to Young, critical theorists viewed the role of the researcher as objective, detached or neutral, and separable from the personal values and assumptions they bring due to the research. An individual's experiences, life histories and stories are not only valuable, but crucial to understanding social interaction. The ability to generalize this experience is not a criterion here; but the consciousness-raising second wave of feminism was greatly influenced by the significance of stories and experience.
de Vault, and Walker explicitly state that social institutions, structures, and cultures are in constant flux. Since feminists believe that contemporary society is organized into structures that support sexism, feminist research is always directed towards change. Thus, it is often found within critical theory. Feminist research must address the subjective meaning of women's and opinions and issues they identify as significant. As the senior Emirati women managers at the heart of this study are the experts and authorities in their own situations, the way in which they create and give meaning to their experiences becomes central. Language shapes the words, concepts, and stereotypes of society; in turn shaping actions, behaviors, and expectations. From the standpoint of women, feminist research enables the study of new topics which go beyond standard social science labels and categories.

Narrative inquiry

Recently, narrative inquiry has earned popularity as a form of systematic inquiry into social research. This is the process of gathering information for the purpose of research through storytelling; the researcher then writes a narrative of the experiences obtained. Connelly and Clandinin note that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and collectively, lead "storied lives"; the central premise of which is that stories are part of the nature of human experiences. According to Murray stories imbue people's thoughts and actions with meaning and are guides to our interpretation of reality. Knights and Wilmott research draws similar conclusions in "lived experience" which is expressed or constructed in narrative forms.

The terms "story" and "narrative" are often interchanged; there are no definitive definitions of either. Some writers employ them separately. Individual constructs of "narrative" and an attempt at representation of "self." The representations are a construct of experience and reality. When a person wants someone else to know who they are or share their life experiences (to rouse empathy) they try to tell a story of their lives. Identity in the form of narrative events is not presented randomly but in a meaningful way. Narratives make up a basic means for humans to make sense of the world. Stories give lives legitimacy and lives are shaped as narratives: "They come from somewhere and are going to somewhere." Narratives do not seek self-fulfillment; important social issues can be addressed, and the answers which society wants can be derived from them. These answers can give guidance on what to do next. Further, the narrative view is also predicated on the belief that those features which make up human experience, including our emotions, our sense of self, our thinking, and our time, are constructed by narrative. People's stories do not make up or reflect reality; they are an individual's representation of reality, socially constructed, and can give a variety of meanings and interpretations. Within social research, narrative inquiry is a way of knowing, constitutive of reality, which moves researchers beyond traditional methods and away from numbers, variables, tables, and questionnaires. We cannot say that stories are the truth; rather, we need to reflect upon the meanings of stories as representing a version of events from the teller, with possible alternative versions according to the reader's interpretation. These innovative approaches to narratives posit that it is through narratives we came to be who we are (however ephemeral, multiple, and changing) by being located or locating ourselves, usually unconsciously, in social narratives rarely of our own making.
All this is of great significance to women disadvantaged by society and seeking a sense of identity. The stories which people tell about their lives form one way of confronting dilemmas; women continue to fight the battle of identity in and through their stories. Feminist perspectives were influential in the researcher's motivation to explore the career experiences of senior Emirati women managers in higher education. Their narratives were a starting point, giving a voice to the voiceless by entering a relationship with them. As a feminist researcher, the author takes women's situations, concerns, experiences, and perspectives as the basis for her work. It was important to hear what the research participants said in their narratives and following the critical theory to see the process of self-consciousness leading to self-

emancipation.

Sampling, procedure and ethical considerations

In this regard, five senior women managers in higher institutions of learning were interviewed, to obtain a general sense of their experiences across the same socio-economic backgrounds. In gaining access and trust, maintaining relationships, learning, and respecting cultural norms, the researcher drew upon her own people skills: Entering the lives of the participants. To dispel any bias or assumptions on her part and potential limitations of interviewing such a small sample, the researcher cross checked with the interviewees to clarify issues that might arise.

Interviews were structured, audio recorded and lasted up to four hours in length. Purposive sampling was deliberately employed: The five women had similar educational backgrounds and were H.E. managers. Two were Deans; one was a departmental chair; another was a dean moving to another post just after the interview. All were Emirati citizens who had received their graduate degrees in Western countries. The data were transcribed before key themes were drawn out. Any information that might be sensitive, personally damaging or compromising for respondents was omitted; pseudonyms were employed through the data collection and analysis process. Each interviewee signed a consent letter which gave them the right to withdraw at any time; confidentiality of the information gathered was assured.

The five women profiled here are:
- Asma, a fully qualified psychiatrist who has held positions as assistant Dean, Vice-Dean and Dean of various universities, before becoming President of a university in Bahrain.
- Fatima, who has taught "more than 16 subjects," was head of a university political science department, boasts many publications and is a member of the Dubai government economic council.
- Ayesha, who has been associate Dean, assistant Dean and now Dean of Students at her current institution.
- Amna, formerly assistant Dean of student affairs, then department chair of the school of education at U.A.E. university.
- Amal, assistant professor and course director, then director of the English language center at the university of Sharjah.

Findings

Gender expectations and discrimination

According to lips the foundations of gender discrimination, differentiation and limitations placed upon Muslim woman can be traced to her early childhood upbringing. She was socialized to take an inferior position to that of her boy siblings. These practices are reflected Emirati society's endorsement of separate gender roles for children beginning at elementary school. Boy siblings are encouraged in their pursuit of independence, exploration, and achievement while girls are rewarded for co-operative and nurturing behavior and discouraged from active and daring play.

As a background to all life pursuits is religious indoctrination which begins in the family and permeates all aspects of education after that. In later years, when queries arose, the subjects of this study found solace and comfort in it as they pursued their studies abroad. Religious education in Emirati schools begins in KG3 at around age five or six.

The images of a righteous Muslim woman have been discussed elsewhere but suffice to say its fundamental tenants include marriage and the raising of god fearing children. A righteous woman is subordinate to the will of her husband. Marriage, therefore, is not only sanctified but is the goal of righteous woman.

This reality is underscored by two factors. All the mothers in the study were teenage mothers who finished high school and entered marriage contracts immediately after.

Iranian Islamic scholar, Janan Izadi acknowledges that Western feminist influences have forced a re-imaging of the righteous Muslim woman. Nevertheless, until the modern age, Izadi argues, the traditional (exegetes) interpretation of the Quran were unanimous in their interpretation.

The most important question to be addressed is whether the Quran viewed men and women as having different natures and whether these natures were placed in two separate degrees, one being superior to the other and the other being regarded as inferior. Izadi argues that in both the Quran and the Hadith (oral tradition), men and women were regarded as having different natures.

These are as follows:

- Superiority of men's rights in general, such as men's share of inheritance their blood price and the superiority of men's testimony.
- Men's superiority in their social responsibilities and positions such as jihad, commandment, caliphate, and judgement.
- The superiority of a husband's rights over his wife, such as in the case of false accusations of adultery only wives are physically punished. The divorce and return of is exclusive to husbands. A wife must obey her husband. She cannot perform a recommendable fast without her husband's permission. Whenever her husband calls her to bed, she must obey and there is no such duty for the husband. Only the husband has the right of polygamy.

A woman's nature is assumed to be frail and therefore requiring certain exclusive protective responsibilities by husbands over wives. These include the duty of financial support of one's wife and paying the wife's dowry. According to Izadi the woman was supposed to stay within certain boundaries and to pay special attention to Allah's commands to avoid bringing the universe into chaos. In all this man was the guardian of Allah's laws, always on guard, lest his wife or daughter bring about a state of chaos into his family.

This supplies a background to the beliefs and atmosphere which greeted Asma al Kansa, as she entered a Quranic school in the newly built school in the village of Al Kansa near the city of Dubai. She and her twelve siblings attended this school. She left at the age of seven to another school recently built near Dubai. Though in later years, she received degrees from Cairo university and London university, she refers repeatedly to her days at the elementary school with fond memories. At the same time, she

recalls how her mother, matriarch of the community and owner of the tailor shop were the center of "community news." The mother had taught herself to read and write, and some mathematics, so she could manage her business. Her mother had access to some newspapers, making her tailor shop the center of buzz feed news. Obviously, a powerful woman, she was consulted by community women. She was ambitious, influencing all her thirteen children to go to university.

Nevertheless, when the matter came up that Asma wanted to go to college, two issues arose. She would be going away from the protection of the family. Worse, when an even more challenging matter came to her father's attention that she wanted to go to Cairo on a government scholarship; without male siblings to provide protection and guidance, she was crossing the boundaries of Islam. If she went to study abroad, she would be too old to attract a partner. There was also the dark assumption by going abroad, she would have lived a life of an infidel woman. The career path she had chosen was in direct conflict with the indelible image of a righteous Muslim woman, married and obedient to her husband. In the end, the community had no choice but to allow Asma go abroad, hoping that her success there would redeem the good name of the village. Going to Cairo and to London presented a risk to the faith and way of life. The future was unknown.

Asma made a curious observation in passing that while she was in high school and college, she often saw how hard women worked in the fields and in their various tasks assigned to them. Education presented an escape route from that drudgery.

An unusual reality of the United Arab Emirates is that by segregating female and male lifestyles and institutions, all female institutions provide unlimited opportunities for female workers and supervisors. While Asma initially opted for a medical degree, she eventually settled for a PhD in psychiatry at the university of London. Returning home, she found opportunities everywhere as colleges for women were opening their doors. She occupied positions as assistant Dean, then Vice Dean at various universities and when the Women's college in Bahrain opened, the minister of education called upon her to accept the challenge as vice chancellor.

But the restrictions imposed by an Islamic society remain. It is preferable that she be driven around by a male escort. Her living arrangements are restricted. Islamic society has not yet made accommodations for single women. Women in similar positions have expressed similar frustrations. Relationships with men outside work are frowned upon. It is as if there is a secret eye watching their private lives.

While she has achieved high positions and advanced her career, the price she has paid in restricted social relationships is yet to be evaluated.

Adler and Israeli findings that the impact of formative experiences can have an impact on later professional success has been overridden by economic and social changes that have taken place in the UAE.

The five women in this study came from conservative Islamic familial backgrounds. Despite these backgrounds, the women achieved considerable career success. The conservative religious backgrounds did presented hoopla's to jump through and that even after career successes were achieved, they presented some restraints on their freedom to navigate their lives. Family members were also concerned at the prospect of the women failing to uphold cultural traditions whereby families live together and close to one another by instead choosing to study abroad. This was an objection which the women had to resist, and even go contrary to societal wishes if their higher educations were to become a reality. Such restraints were not imposed on their male siblings.

The second woman, Fatima, was raised in a group home with aunts and uncles cooperating in providing livelihoods for the whole group. Though girls were separated from boys at an early age, were directed towards different chores, they were still within the compound. Girls occupied separate spaces as did boys. There was no privacy so to speak. Girls remained within the home until married. Therefore, it was important for the family (the aunts) to scout for suitable boys to marry their girls. In this task, the aunts conspired with the mothers of the boys in nearby compounds.

Fatima left home in her early twenties after graduating from college. She spent six years in Cairo, away from her family and only other boy sibling, where she earned her M.A. and PhD degrees in political science. She returned to the Emirates where she headed a political science department. With many publications to her name, she was invited to join the Dubai economic council.

Since the Dubai government was experimenting with a new school system in the 1970's, it fell upon the teachers to influence the students about the future. Fatima's parents were illiterate, but her father had a grasp of the transformative nature of education. Nevertheless, Fatima credits her early childhood teacher as acting in a prophetic manner by inspiring her students. Together with that prophetic message came the religious drill from her teacher. "From we were small, told us: "Be honest. Don't cheat. Don't put yourself before others, and when you do anything, just be sure god sees you…if …you do the right things…god will help you." The classes were segregated by gender.

When she graduated from college, while her qualifications could have prepared her for journalism, religion, family, and tradition did not encourage women to be in the streets, exposing themselves to men and the world. Two opportunities were permissible, teaching history at a girl's school or working at a women's hospital.

Mazawi and Mostafa confirm that Emirati society laid down clear boundaries of what career path a young woman could pursue. When Fatima chose journalism, she says: "My family refused, and thanks to God they refused…at that time I decided to continue my master's and PhD degree in Cairo because…there wasn't a master's program in my country." To be certain there were more restrictions placed on a girl child than a boy child as to what career paths were suitable for her. Further, such decisions seem to have involved the whole family.

In Fatima's case, some encouragement came from the father rather than the mother or siblings. There is a reason for that. If the mother had taken the lead in encouraging her daughter to go abroad, she would have been regarded as encouraging a rebellious attitude towards Islam and against the status of women in society.

Going away to Cairo raised some concerns. Fatima lived alone, without the support and guidance of any male siblings and elders for many years. That set her apart as an independent woman.

Fatima acknowledges that attitudes have changed, that Emirati women have been empowered, and that they enjoy a bigger pool of opportunities to choose from. But the social expectations of a righteous Muslim woman, caring for her family and husband have remained. She has relations with men at work, but society does not expect these relations to be carried outside the

workplace. As is the case with other women in high positions, she is chauffeured by a male companion who assumes the role of guardian as well. "And also, the Arab world in the 1960's and 1970's was different than (in the) 1980's and 1990's/. I feel with this all Arabs you call it a revolution or changes as if we are in the 1950's or 1960's in the Arab world. People try to change their life to find a new future, but we do not know what is behind this." Fatima has remained single.

Ayesha-al Timba, woman number three was born in the small fishing village of Timba in the Eastern Emirates. Also raised in a group setting, she says that while her parents were both illiterate, the men going out to fish at night and working on their small plots during the say, the most influential person in her life was a senior aunt.

She places emphasis on group think and group action. The first of six children, she took part in building houses out of palm leaves, "with the help of neighbors and friends." The farming was also a group activity.

"We never used to buy things except rice and flour…for example, we used to bring from the field's onions, whatever was seasonal. The same applied to meat because, having lived from the sea, those people were very dependent on seafood, so we never used to buy these (fish)."

These were all group activities involving both children and adults. She would have remained in this village if it were not for a stroke of luck that came her way.

The ruler of Abu Dhabi was enlightened enough to want her daughters to receive a modern education.

"I had my education in…school…from my primary to my secondary school. The ruler of the Emirates, he was an advocate of education. He established a school (for girls) and sent his daughters there. Therefore, we had an opportunity enough for me. I was lucky."

In the next interview, she refers to a group of aunties. The women in this extended family took an interest in this new experiment by the ruler of Abu Dhabi. The nature of the extended family needs emphasis.

"In the neighborhood I grew up in an extended family, my aunties…all lived in a big house and when they got married, they moved out of the fence, but they were still close, so the family area consisted of all children and unmarried women and young men. I was brought up in an extended family with sisters, aunts, father, mother, uncles, grandmother, and grandmother, all living in one place."

The fact that the ruler has his daughters in school made it acceptable for tribesmen who were otherwise reluctant to allow girls to go to school. Despite this, apprehensions were expressed when she proposed that she go abroad to further her education. Her great aunt supported Ayesha's ambition. The influence this aunt exerted on her illustrates the importance of the extended family support on her career.

"I had an aunt…god bless her soul and she was the most influential and I considered her as a real leader, a woman leader in her family…one person must be chosen to go to basic Quran and mathematical and numerical information and because my family had a girl child, she was the oldest so she could be educated. She went into basic education like Quran usually and there were about six girls and did not have a boy sibling at that time…who could be an effective leader of the family. (So) everybody went to her for an opinion…and she instilled this in her sisters. She learned to do quite a lot of jobs and she used to take women in her house…her house was like a place where you have people come and get advice…she was excellent in embroidery and in making dresses…she was very helpful; in this so people came there to learn. Not only this but she also become educated in local medicine so helped treat people and take even those that are less fortunate. She would take them into her house and she would accommodate them. So, I grew up. That encouraged me and gave me a push in life and created my first skills on how women are supposed to live and how important women are. Also, I used to look at my mother, my aunties working in the fields doing all the daily chores."

Ayesha's role model, her great aunt, was a woman of strong character who did not play a secondary role to any man. In addition, she was a community leader, and her home was the center of business activity as well as a place where those in need could come for help.

Later in life, she reflected on the tradeoffs of life. After a long and successful life, she still remembered what she had lost as a result.

"The way you were brought up in an extended family and suddenly you find yourself in a house with someone and the separation started to happen. How you lived in an extended family and how later you (feel) alone."

Ayesha alluded to the social changes she had faced when she went abroad, social changes which her colleagues had also referred to. She found herself separated from her family and lonely, a clear downside to the academic opportunities she enjoyed. She could not take part in many of the gender mixed social events at her university on account of her Islamic background. The inability to enjoy social fellowships with the extended family was to continue long after she returned home to the Emirates. Her newfound leadership position, and uplift in social mobility (class) had confirmed her separation from her lowly extended family, thus exacerbating her loneliness.

Almost as an aside, Ayesha recalls the lack of individual space in the community house and the drudgery of physical work that took place day in and day out. Education offered an escape.

She also remembers the prolonged conversations that took place in her family about going abroad. "It was a challenge for me to convince my parents that I was going abroad, but I did in the end. I went and they said that she will find it difficult when she comes back; but I was more assertive to finish my studies and I did."

Some of the fears which had to do with finding a partner had become self-fulfilling. Ayesha has remained single.

Woman number 4: Amna the Bedouin girl child was the eldest of seven children, four sisters and two brothers. She grew up in a small communal Bedouin village. Both her parents were illiterate and were indifferent to the value of education. However, the founding father of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan progressive ideas included education for girls, an idea he had put into practice by founding a college for girls.

But Amna says that in the Bedouin village in which she lived, the government took more practical steps to encourage children to attend school. School meals were the answer. "They gave us food to motivate us to attend school." There were other hurdles to overcome.

"There were not enough facilities (schools) around. The distance from my village (to school) was 30 to 35 minutes by bus…and riding the bus scared me how I would go far away." A common thread in the narratives was that in almost all the outlying villages, gender separation was not an issue as it became later in life. "We were playing with boys. Everything was quite simple at that time. I also liked to play with my brothers, sisters, and

neighbors."

This freedom soon ended. Gender separation and consciousness was enforced as soon as possible by school authorities.
"Boys were in another school without mixing. But we knew each other because we were together up to grade 3. While at high school, we sort of played together, sort of, of course. We even had physical education teachers who taught us sports. But this teacher did not allow us to mix with the boys even when we went to another class…but every now and then the other teacher would allow us to go and play whenever we wanted."
Since her parents were far removed from the world of education, and schooling was itself a new idea, it was left to her teachers to provide the vision and the role models to follow. Her history teacher filled in that role of mentor, fostering a spirit of resolve and determination as the social and economic world around them was fast changing.

DISCUSSION

In addition to the history teacher, the physical education teacher realized the importance of academic subjects and that if the learners were to go to college, they needed a good grounding in those areas. So, during physical exercise period, he allowed them to do their homework and catch up with their curricula. Amna mentions a curious development which relates to the above discussion. While Sheikh Zayed had provided free college education for girls, religion and culture still placed emphasis on the role of a devout Muslim woman. Despite the dramatic changes going on around the girls, and opportunities opening for them, very few at the time realized their full impact.
"We finished the bachelor's degree, and I am the only one who went abroad for further education, master's, and a PhD. The rest got married."
Two issues became of great concern to the family. Though Amna held a bachelor's degree, she was not certified to teach. The second issue, which was of great concern to the family, was that she wanted to go abroad to further her studies, leaving her family behind. If she went abroad, she would be exposed to an infidel world, would be without the protection of a male sibling and would be too old for marriage on her return. Her father, who saw that her talents were still to be developed, and that going abroad was a possibility, "got problems from my cousins who did not like the idea of me going to study in the USA…so my mother and my uncle stuck behind me and my brother as I went to do my master's then my PhD. And when I got back, my father was very proud of me." Some emphasis is necessary because the resistance by the community to a woman going abroad was shrouded in the religious and cultural milieu of the society.
'My family was resistant when I said that I had to go abroad to study. It had not happened before that the first daughter had to go to university. Most girls got married by the 10th grade or Grade 11. So, my father was telling me that when I finished high school, I did not have to go to university. I could get married. But my mother said no, and that I could continue with education…without certification, how will I continue in life?"
Despite Amna's more positive interpretation of her family's attitude about leaving home to study in the United States, there was a general resistance to the idea. Her bothers said that if it was difficult for a boy to do well in the US, it must even be more difficult for a lonely Muslim girl to proper in such a foreign country.

Since the government paid for her studies, and Amna was determined to go abroad she returned home with a PhD degree in hand, the pride of the community was redeemed, and the unflattering words previously exchanged were now made light of, After serving in various positions in the university system, she was appointed Dean of students. She remains single.
Amal the Sharjite, the fifth woman in our case studies, came from a wealthy urban family. Her father was head of the customs office in the UAE, well known businessperson and owner of three companies. Amal boasted that her father was "richer" and that their family house was "clean, luxurious, big villa with all the facilities" including air condition.
She said that she had a happy childhood, played with boys and girls in her neighborhood. She went to school at the age of five and remained at this mixed gender school until the age of nine when she transferred to an all girls' school.
An active student, she excelled in extra curricula activities.
"Gymnastics, swimming dance, art drawing and needle work, school theater plays: I participated in many school pays, choir, played music clubs only school clubs…all activities. Mental and sporting activities, reading, playing music, needle, and fine art."

Amal recognized the influence the community had on her upbringing and the role played by her parents, relatives, neighbors, religious leaders, and coaches in encouraging her in her career. She believes that her father had a serious attitude towards work and goal setting while her mother showed a more humane attitude towards the community. This instilled in her a commitment to contribute to the community wherever she can and developing certain sensitivity towards community needs. Coaches, however, wanted her to achieve a level of perfection whether it was in sports or in the debating clubs. However, apart from father, she lists her English female teacher when she was 14 years old, as inspirational. This teacher inspired her to excellence and to become an all rounded personality, engaging at high school in 4-H activities, art, dance, choir, clubs, church, scouts and even becoming head of the school sports team. The school was a training ground for leadership training.
In summary, Amal was unusual in all respects in that her school activities covered a wide range and that her sports activities, while emphasizing leadership also helped her develop social and inclusive skills.
While her school career was exceptional, Amal did not escape the restrictions which her religion and society placed on girl children.
"Yes, in the 1980's, women felt shy and unaccepted to work with a man. I refused some promotions for prestigious jobs in the 1990's because I felt myself that the role, I would assume was unaccepted by society."
It was not that she was being excluded from those opportunities, she argues. "No, it is not a question of women being treated differently. It is you who feel that the situation is incorrect. That you cannot do it."
Eventually, she overcame this feeling of inadequacy, but at that time social mores and attitudes were also in a state of flux. The dominant patriarchal culture that prevailed in her earlier career was giving way to a more gender tolerant society.
Amal is the only one who is married.

Humble family backgrounds

Of the five participants, only one, Amal, came from a well off

family. She told the researcher: "I am from a high standard family (which is) educated and speaks four languages." Her father was "a head of the custom hall in the U.A.E.: A prestigious job and a well known businessman with three big companies to run." Amal was also the only interviewee to come from a stable financial background, emphasizing her "happy family (with a) father (who) became richer"; and that she was brought up in an urban area, in "a clean, luxurious, big villa with all modern facilities".

A much humbler family background could be identified in the case of the remaining four interviewees. Either one or both their parents were illiterate. Moreover, Asma grew up in a "house without electricity"; Ayesha in "summer houses which were basically made of palm trees, because we did not have air conditioning at the time"; while both Amna's parents were illiterate. "They didn't know the value of education at that time." That 80 percent of these women had such a difficult start in life speaks greatly to their tenacity and determination to achieve. Equally notable is how aspirational their parents appear to have been, especially on the example they set their children. Asma's mother, for example, "taught herself to read and to have basic mathematics" to develop and run her own business; and was "determined to see that her six brothers and sisters get degree education"; while Fatima's hugely influential father "is intelligent… he educated himself" and provided enormous encouragement throughout her school education.

Ayesha's case is especially noteworthy here. Her parents, who were both illiterate, worked in the fields and when opportunity arose went out to sea as fishermen.

"We never bought things like bigger families… we never used to buy things except rice, flour but groceries… for example, we used to bring from the field's onions, whatever, they are seasonal. The same with meat because, having lived from the sea, those people were very dependent on the seafood, so we never used to buy these."

This sense of aspiration, whether taking the form of formal or informal occupations on the part of the participants parents, appears to have been paramount: Encouraging in their daughters a strong sense of resolve, determination, ambition, and work ethic. Asma's mother was an extremely strong, immensely positive role   model, who set up her own business; while Ayesha's aunt "learnt to do quite a lot of jobs… That encouraged me and gave me a push in life." educational access most of the women's families were poor, though not so poor that this prevented their education from being treated as a priority. Three participants had parents who were not in formal employment; only one came from a family enjoying a stable income; and four also had many brothers and sisters. Three of the interviewees were brought up in rural settings.

Most of the women also lacked access to many of the basic facilities which would enable them to obtain a good education. A number attended schools in far flung locations: The means with which to get to and from school were at times limited. In Amna's case, for instance: "There were not enough facilities…when I was young, it was one and half hours from my village by bus… just riding the bus scared me how I would go far away."

In some cases, their family homes lacked electricity, air conditioning or furniture. Most of them had difficulty studying at night in cases where the family income could not cover the paraffin necessary for a lamp; and that in hot conditions, daytime studies became both challenging and uncomfortable.

Ridge and Madsen have established that socio-economic status closely correlates to educational access in the Middle East. Educational and income levels of parents play a highly influential part in access to and success in education. The narratives of four women in our study disprove this theory. Educational expectation can be linked to both social and cultural capital. Early childhood socialization practices and experiences, as well as social class, are factors which can fashion lifelong attitudes held by women about themselves and their capabilities. The beliefs and attitudes which others hold about women are reflected in their expectations of and daily interactions are they overt or covert with them. Sharabi endorses this, arguing that such capital can be acquired, exchanged, and converted to other forms. He regards family background, the business level of parents, and social class as factors impacting on academic success. In this case, though, poor family background and social class can be regarded as motivating factors in the success of the five Emirati women.

We have noted that in the interviews, the women felt, without expressing it outright, that career success was a passport from the hardships and drudgery which their parents experienced.

Importance of faith

After grade three, children were separated from each other. Their pre-school education involved developing their skills in reading the Quran, a key requirement for Emirati women before they start formal schooling.

Yet this did not lead to negative consequences in their social development, and instead enabled those to enjoy a conducive, beneficial, faith based academic environment. Moreover, the Islamic faith instilled by their parents and schools did not deter them from seeking to develop their careers to where they are now, ponder whether Islamic traditions and customs continue to play a significant role in influencing how Emirati women behave in the workplace. The women in our study regarded Islam as central to their lives. They also say that when abroad, their faith was a source of comfort in times of challenge and distress.

All five women have kept Islamic dress codes as outward expression of their faith. They attributed their success to the discipline which accompanied their faith. Most notable here was Fatima: from a very early age, her parents told her: "Be honest. Don't cheat. Don't put our yourself before… others; and when you do anything, just be sure that god sees you… if… you do the right things…god will help you."

Islam also guided their interpersonal relationships even when abroad. He five women lived responsibly and displayed respect towards all others; rising to their feet, for example, whenever a visitor entered their room. Some of their relatives, especially their parents, feared that studying abroad would diminish their reverence for their faith and traditions.

CONCLUSION

The image of the righteous Muslim woman: According to Imam Izadi and the exegetes referred to earlier in this chapter, the image of a righteous woman places restrictive prescriptions on her behavior, including a dress code, restrictions on movement, types of employment suitable for her, and above all, she is required to carry out the mission of being a mother. This strict interpretation is undergoing transformation.

Shedding of prescribed social roles: The achievements of women in this study are testimony to the fact that women putting

aside the role once prescribed to them by society. Government takes the credit for the following achievements.

- Female literacy rates have increased sharply from just 22.4 percent in 1980 to 90 percent by 2007.
- Higher education enrolment (tertiary) shows that women make up 60 percent of the student population.
- The UAE government has opened opportunities for women to serve in the military, air force and police, confronting and defeating gender stereotypes which held women back across the region.

Correlation between socio-economic class and educational access: Ridge and Madsen assertion that that socio-economic status closely correlates to educational access in the Middle East needs some modification.

While it is an advantage to have parents in a high income bracket, educational opportunities in the UAE are open to everyone. Of the five women in our study, only one came from a high-income bracket. The success of the four women depended on their own efforts and the support they got from their extended families. Nevertheless, Sharabi is correct, as has shown that childhood socialization practices and experiences, as well as social class, are factors which can fashion lifelong attitudes held by women about themselves and their capabilities. The beliefs and attitudes which others hold about women are reflected in their expectations of and daily interactions be they overt or covert.

Amal, one of the five women says that it was not so much that they were denied opportunities but they themselves refused opportunities offered them in the belief that such positions were unsuitable for women. Changes in social attitudes in Emirati society over time allowed Amal to accept challenging assignments she would refused before.

Sharabi's social capital contradicted: Contrary to Sharabi's thesis that social capital and the entrepreneurial achievement of parents, serve as pre endowments in favor of success, in the case of the five women in our study, their poverty stricken backgrounds served as strong motivators for academic and career success.

Academic qualifications were the answer to the enjoyment of an upward social mobility and a better life than their parents had experienced.

At present, the UAE government is ahead of social and economic trends. It has launched programs to advance women causes in all areas of endeavor. It is the social and religious inhibitions that are holding women from taking advantage of these opportunities. For instance, only one fifth of employees in the hotel industry are Emiratis because religious and social inhibitions frown upon working in the proximity of infidel male customers and long hours take away from family naturing.

Similarly, government programs in the arts, film making and culture which involve bodily exhibitions are frowned upon. Government can provide guidance, training, and financial support in such areas where female participation is low. Hewlett says that there is a clear case to be made for government intervention and leadership in sponsoring women entrepreneurship in these areas.

Smith and Mazin and Bristol-Rhys and Osella argue that international companies are better positioned to train and promote female leadership much more effectively than small and medium local enterprises. Multi national corporations draw on their experiences elsewhere and can send individuals abroad for development courses. To be successful, training programs should include men as well as they are part of the workforce atmosphere in which women work.

In summary, the U.A.E. has the potential to break new ground in true gender equality in the workplace, but this will not come solely from government regulation. However, social, and cultural attitudes in the private corporations which mirror general attitudes in society, are in a state of flux towards inclusivity.

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