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Emirati women journalists bargaining with patriarchy in search of equality

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EMIRATI WOMEN JOURNALISTS BARGAINING WITH PATRIARCHY IN SEARCH OF EQUALITY¹

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PhD

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¹ The researcher would like to acknowledge that the title of this thesis was inspired by Deniz Kandiyoti's articles which were published twice, first in 1988 as *Bargaining with Patriarchy: Gender and Society*, and second in 1998 as *Gender, Power and Contestation: Rethinking Bargaining with Patriarchy*. For a complete description, please see the list of references section.

EMIRATI WOMEN JOURNALISTS BARGAINING WITH PATRIARCHY IN SEARCH OF EQUALITY

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, arguments have been made about the absence of Emirati women journalists in analyzing political and economic news stories. The role of Emirati women in journalism has been and remains anonymous. They are rarely seen taking part in this field, in comparison with their peers in other states in the Arabian Peninsula, particularly in Kuwait and Bahrain, where women have reported on complex political and social issues since the 1960s and 1970s. In addition, the field of broadcast media and journalism has proven to be a challenging one for Emirati women to enter, due to socio-cultural constraints set by a patriarchal society that prefers the practise of traditional gender roles.

To shed light on this phenomenon, this doctoral research will present an in-depth study of media development and the emergence of women's journalism in the UAE, using two types of empirical research methodology. The first is participant observation, which took place at Dubai Media Incorporated's news centre (Dubai TV) and Abu Dhabi Media Company's news centre (Abu Dhabi Channel One). The second is semi-structured interviews, in which 40 Emirati and Arab expat journalists were interviewed, and were categorized based on gender, with 30 females and 10 males, and stratification. For the latter, journalists were divided into two generational groups: journalists who belong to 'the early generation', between the ages of 30 and 60, who practised journalism from the 1970s to the 1990s; and journalists who belong to 'the new generation', who are in their 20s, and started practising journalism from the year 2000 onward.

This research will make a significant contribution to the study of Gulf and Arab media and gender studies, as it is the first to investigate gender dynamics in Emirati newsrooms, and in particular the influence of tribal and patriarchal culture in determining Emirati women's roles as newsmakers. It is also the first to observe and document the newsroom norms and journalistic practises in the Emirates, which are delimited by an oppressive 40-year-old media law, authoritarian political power control, and censorship. Therefore, this study highlights specific themes that are under-examined in the Emirates, including gender dynamics and self-censorship practises in

the newsroom. It is also the first empirical study to use ethnography in order to examine these themes.

To My Mother, Layla

For breaking the mold, and for teaching me that my life as an individual, with all its opportunities, choices, and decisions, belongs to me alone, and not to any man.

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PREFACE

My passion for Arabic language and history led me towards journalism as a professional field for enriching one's life with knowledge, intellect, insight, experience, and public respect. I pursued the study of mass communication and media sciences from 2001, with the sole determination that, one day, I would use my understanding of the practise and ethics of journalism to report hard edge news and become the Arab equivalent of CNN's correspondent Christian Amanpour, or BBC's Frank Gardner.

But my ambitions and my outlook on Emirati media changed completely because of the stereotypes of women in the media, and the domination of Emirati newsrooms by men, which I first encountered when I was interviewed for various roles including news anchor, host of a children's radio programme, and desk news reporter. Questioning the reality of the media landscape in The Emirates led me to write my Master's thesis on the historical development of women's journalism in The Emirates. The opportunity arose in 2016 to pursue the subject more extensively for a PhD.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My understanding of journalism reached a new level after joining The College of Media, Arts and Design at the University of Westminster in London, thanks to the support of my supervisor, Dr. Tarik Sabry. His guidance and advice throughout the development of my doctoral research changed my perspective as an individual and an intellectual. I learned about various Arab and Western gender and media related studies which were completely new to me.

Dr. Sabry opened the doors to a whole new world for me through books, theories, and theorists, and the analysis of media, gender, and women from different perspectives, which made me realize the complexity of the social context in which I was born and raised, and which shaped me. I am sincerely grateful for his presence in my life, for he was directly responsible for bringing out my hidden self that had been longing to speak out without fear, to think without being petrified of receiving criticism, to make decisions and take action without worrying about social constraints, and to be proud of my heritage and culture; 'the culture of giving' as he puts it.

Furthermore, I would like to extend my gratitude to my mother, Layla, my soulmate and guardian angel, whose prayers and strength in the face of many struggles since the day I was born have protected me throughout this roller coaster ride I call life. She will always remain my inspiration and, in my eyes, a resilient feminist in her own right. She broke the mold at a time when women in some parts of the Arab and Gulf regions were seen as inferiors, and liberated herself from the chain of social constraints to achieve self-worth through her work as an educator and a proud single parent of five children.

Finally, I would like to thank my family and friends for their motivational support throughout my PhD journey: Dr. Mercedes Bunz and Dr. Roza Tsagarousianou for their significant advice and guidance to improve this doctoral study; Dr. Anthony McNicholas for his assistance with books, studies, and articles related to news sociology, a course that he teaches and that I was welcomed to join in order to expand my knowledge in this particular sphere; Dr. David Bulla at Zayed University for his support and feedback in the early stages of this study; Mrs. Jinan Jarrah for assisting

me with the technicalities of my scholarship; and Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Higher Education Grant, which is run by Emirates Foundation, for granting me with this scholarship opportunity. Last but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to all the Emirati and Arab expat journalists, whose valuable contributions made this doctoral research possible.

AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I, the undersigned **Noura Abdulmalek Al Obeidli** hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. To the best of my knowledge, this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted as part of the requirements of any other academic degree or non-degree programme, in English or in any other language.

This is a true copy of the thesis, including final revisions.

Date: 9th November 2020

Name: Noura Al Obeidli

Signature:  _____

DEFINITIONS

Arabizi:	Colloquial Arabic written using English letters.
Blind patriotism:	A practise that demands total loyalty to causes determined by a centralized leader or a leading group, with deliberate political ignorance.
Development journalism:	A type of journalism which supports government policies and programmes that are designed to build integrated, stable, and economically developed societies (Allan, 2010, p.149).
Enlightening media:	A term often used by journalists interviewed in this thesis. In this context, an enlightening media is a form of media ethics that relates to journalistic practise in The Emirates, where journalists practise responsible reporting to highlight news that is relevant to public interest, and to the improvement of government services. The practise also dictates that journalists avoid the invasion of other people's privacy, and instil through responsible reporting the distinctive Emirati social values to preserve national cohesion and sustain the country's political and economic stability.
Emiratisation:	A development process that seeks to replace a reliance on foreign expatriate workers with UAE nationals. It is not only about recruiting UAE nationals to replace expatriates, but it is also a major process that requires training UAE nationals to acquire the skills and competencies for the assigned work or job.

Gender:	A concept that refers to a system of roles and relationships between women and men, which are determined not by biology, but by social, political and economic contexts (Sikoska, 1999, p.2).
Isnad:	A chain of narrators who are attesting to the historical authenticity of a particular hadith or the prophetic quotes.
Jahiliya:	A term used in reference to a historical period before the dawn of Islam. It is associated with ignorance of and deviation from the true religion, a deviation that has also moral, social, and political implications (Sulaimani, 1986, p.5).
Nabatean poetry:	Poetry written in Emirati dialect.
Nationalism:	An ideological and social movement aimed at modernizing the nation, and women's relationship to their nation as transmitters of the nation's culture and signifiers of its values through their natural roles as mothers and daughters (Schedneck, 2013, pp.53-54).
Participant observation:	The process of intensively studying a social group by immersing oneself in the day-to-day lives of people in the group (Miall, Pawluch and Shaffir, 2005, p.3).
Patriarchy:	A system of social structures and practises in which men dominate, oppress, and exploit women (Walby, 1991, p.19).
Psychological oppression:	To be weighed down in your mind and to have control exercised over your self-esteem (Bartky, 1990, p.22).

Salafism:	A hybrid of Wahabism and conservative Islam, Salafism is a revivalist movement formed by Sunni theologians between the 1970s and 1980s, and is still widespread in the Arabian Gulf States.
The Trucial States:	A group of tribal sheikdoms that resided in the southeastern Persian Gulf (Arabian, but mapped as Persian by the British), such as the Al Qawasim tribe, which established treaties for an informal protectorate by Britain from 1820 until 1971.
Wahabism:	A revivalist movement formed by Sunni theologians in pursuit of Islamic purity.
Wasta:	An Arabic term commonly used in The Emirates and Arab Gulf States to refer to an improper scheme or an act of expediency to gain advantage or break policy.
Nasserism:	Based on the political philosophies of former Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser (1918-1970), it is 'a system of ideas comprising all or some of the following components: anti-imperialism, pan-Arabism (or nationalism), and Arab socialism.' (Podeh and Winckler, 2009, p.2)
Fitna:	An Arabic word that has multiple connotations. From a political perspective, it means trial and war. From a sexual perspective, it means seduction and temptation.
Haram:	An Arabic word for a forbidden or prohibited act, objects, or conducts.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

'There's no freedom of the press. We are tools aimed at promoting government initiatives. We don't practise investigative reporting'.
Anonymous Emirati editor, Abu Dhabi News Centre.

'My mother used to tell me: "people who join the media have a bad reputation. I have raised a belly dancer!"' Rawdha, 35, Emirati journalist, *Zahrat Al Khaleej Magazine*.

Despite the emergence of three generations of successful and pioneer journalists in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) since the mid 1960s, views on the media landscape remain cynical. This is due to socio-cultural restraints and political restrictions, and religious and patriarchal perceptions that have been instrumentally embedded in the mindset of Emiratis. Such restraints and perceptions have shaped a distinct identity for the Emirati individual, which revolves around 'tribal' homogeneity in the private and collective spheres, and in forming a gender gap characterised by specific ideologies and stereotypes, and a struggle over women's roles in the public and private spheres.

The complexity of the media landscape in the Emirates deepened with the introduction of 'The Publication and Publishing Law' by the Ministry of Information and Culture in November 1980², which was formed following the UAE's political independence on 2nd December 1971. The penalizing articles of this law have not been amended since, during almost 40 years, resulting in the decline of press freedom in the Emirates, and in the practise of excessive self-censorship. This is despite public demands for change to protect Emirati journalists, and continuous international criticism of the law and its oppressive articles that limit freedom of expression.

Furthermore, the distinctive tribal and political environment have made Emirati male and female journalists conscious of their government's main purpose in developing a

² The Ministry of Information and Culture was terminated in 2006 and replaced by The National Media Council (NMC), a federal government entity that was chaired by Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, Minister of Foreign Affairs, until 2015.

media industry in the country; that is, to promote the Emirati state's political and economic agenda. This includes sustaining political tribal allegiance and loyalty, and gaining a good reputation and recognition on the international scene, especially concerning the empowerment of women.

Censored and criticism free, all Emirati media platforms have been utilized to champion the government's ongoing agenda of empowering Emirati women, which it refers to as 'nation building'; not only through providing state-backed education, but also encouraging their emancipation in the workforce, against all the odds, in its patriarchal society. After the first female school was established in 1954, followed by the first female university in 1976 (Ghazal, 2014), Emirati women began to join professions that were supposedly alien to their 'natural' nurturing roles, which included the newsroom.

However, the government's campaign to empower Emirati women has turned into a battle of the sexes inside the workplace, including the newsroom, where various forms of inequality, discrimination, misogyny, sexism, and nepotism have surfaced. Not only this, but the government's campaign to empower Emirati women has led to the emergence of state feminism, whose proponents are none other than the neo-traditionalist governing rulers of the seven federal emirates³ and their wives, who chair most of the women-focused, government funded organizations. This includes The Women Union, which emphasizes Islamic education for Emirati women through lessons, lectures, and conferences focusing on Islam as a faith, wellbeing, family related matters and welfare, and general skills improvement.

Through an Islamized state feminism that focuses on preserving Emirati socio-cultural components including heritage and national cohesion, the government aims to achieve 'unity, identity-building, and stability through women's educational empowerment, establishing the framework within which women are expected to take up public roles' (Krause, 2009, p.97).

³ The seven federal emirates are (in order of political power and hierarchy): Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm Al Qaiwain, Ras Al Khaimah, and Fujairah.

1.1 Rationale and Justification for the Research

Living in a closely guarded patriarchal system has impacted Emirati women's consciousness and self-worth, and many report feeling shame as well as fear of damaging their families' tribal reputation and honour. Patriarchy has also impacted their contribution to public life, due to the lack of equal opportunities in various sectors and professional fields, including journalism.

As experienced by women journalists worldwide and documented in previous media-related studies such as Allan et al. (1998), Sakr (2004), Rush et al. (2004), Rahbani (2010), Mellor (2007), and Al Malki (2012), entering the newsroom and working in the media industry have proven difficult for Emirati women, because of the sexist attitudes and stereotypes that men (Emiratis and Arab expats) often demonstrate. As the following chapters will reveal, sexism and misogyny inside the newsroom have influenced Emirati women journalists' performance and enthusiasm, and their initiative to produce hard edge news stories. Meanwhile, the restrictive policies set by the chief editors (mostly men) at local media corporations have diminished the practise of investigative journalism, increased the practise of self-censorship, and reduced Emirati women journalists' ability to write about sectors other than childcare, parenting, healthcare, fashion, beauty, and culinary arts, which are viewed as soft and uncritical, and fitting for women journalists in general.

Within this framework, this doctoral research was developed after five years of studying Emirati women's representation in the media, as part of my Master's dissertation. I came to realize that there is scarce information on the history of media development and women's contribution to the field of journalism in the Emirates. The sources available were written only in Arabic, created by non-Emirati historians, and published in the early 1980s or the mid 1990s, such as Kuwaiti author Layla Salih's *Adab Al Maraa Fi Al Khaleej Al Arabi*⁴, which was published in 1983, and Egyptian author Ahmed Nafadi's *Al Sihafa Fi Dowlat Al Emarat Al Arabiya: Tataworat Tarikhiya*⁵, which was published in 1996. These books discussed the media development in the Emirates in a descriptive way, listing the newspapers and magazines that were

⁴ Arabic for 'women's literature in the Arabian Gulf' (أدب المرأة في الخليج العربي).

⁵ Arabic for 'journalism in the UAE: a historical development' (الصحافة في دولة الإمارات العربية تطورات تاريخية).

founded in the country since its independence in 1971. However, comprehensive debates on the history of media (both print and broadcast) and the consequences of the publication of the first media law in the Emirates can be found in only two studies: *Al Sihafa Fi Dowal Al Khaleej Al Arabi*⁶ (1983), by Iraqi author Azza Ali Ezzat, and *Media Law in the United Arab Emirates* (2014), by American scholar Dr. Matt J. Duffy.

Therefore, my doctoral research is the first to investigate gender dynamics in Emirati newsrooms, with a focus on the influence of the tribal, patriarchal culture in determining Emirati women's role as news-makers; shedding light on the stories of pioneering Emirati women journalists, who struggled socially and culturally to make a mark in this important profession, through self-expression and writing. My research is also the first to observe and document the newsroom norms and journalistic practises in the Emirates, which are delimited by an oppressive 40-year-old media law, authoritarian political control, and censorship.

Hence, the following key research questions have been used to investigate the socio-cultural challenges that Emirati women journalists endure in a distinctively tribal and patriarchal society; one which is governed by an authoritarian regime, whose political practises reinforce state feminism as a form of empowerment for Emirati women, and controls all media platforms to protect itself from external threats to its national cohesion and stability.

1. What are the socio-cultural factors that challenge Emirati women journalists?
2. What constitutes the glass ceiling that Emirati women journalists face in their professional careers?
3. How does the masculine culture of the newsroom challenge the existing journalistic practises and norms in the Emirates?
4. Does gender inequality have an impact on Emirati women journalists' presence in this field?

⁶ Arabic for 'journalism in the Arab Gulf States' (الصحافة في دول الخليج العربي).

To reach the objectives of this study, two ethnographic methods were applied. The first was participant observation, which took place over four weeks at two government funded media corporations: Dubai News Centre (Dubai TV), operated by Dubai Media Incorporated, and Abu Dhabi News Centre (Abu Dhabi Channel One), operated by Abu Dhabi Media Company. The second was semi-structured interviews, in which 40 Emirati and Arab expat journalists (25 Emiratis and 15 Arab expats) were interviewed face-to-face. These journalists were categorized based on gender (30 female journalists and 10 male journalists took part) and on stratification with journalists from the early generation (1970s – 1990s), between the ages of 30 to 60, and journalists from the new generation (2000s onward), in their twenties. All in all, this element of the research took almost four months, in quarters one and two of 2017.

These qualitative ethnographic methods were selected with the aim of analysing gender, the central focus of this study, in the newsrooms of the Emirates, and how male and female Emirati and Arab expat journalists construct gender differences and identity, and how this influences their everyday attitudes, conversations, routines, and journalistic practises. Through participant observation and semi-structured interviews, this study will discuss why journalists practise self-censorship in the newsroom, arguing that media in the Emirates is engulfed by political oppression and patriotism.

1.2 Women and the Press in the UAE

According to one of the Emirates' most prominent journalists, Abdul Ghaffar Hussein, the press was founded in the Trucial States⁷ (the Emirates today) five centuries ago through shipmasters, who wrote daily reports to convey news under the name of *Roznama*.⁸ The first shipmaster and navigator to ever use this method was Shihab Al Din Ahmad Ibn Majid (1430 – 1500), who was born in Julfar⁹ and was fluent in a number of languages including Urdu, Persian, and Tamil (Salamah, 2005, pp.38-47).

Attempts to produce news continued, albeit at intervals, due to the difficult economic conditions during the pre-oil era. During the 1920s and 1930s, wealthy merchants and grocery shop owners like Ibrahim Mohammed Al Medfaa and Mosabah Obaid Al

⁷ For a brief description, please see the definitions section.

⁸ Persian for 'calendar' (روزنامه).

⁹ The northern emirate of Ras Al Khaimah today.

Dhaheri published two newsletters, *Oman* and *Al Nikhi*¹⁰, using modest materials like cuttlefish ink, paper bags, and palm fronds. The newsletters informed the local community of various news stories, including announcements that were released by the Sheikh's Palace, and published updates on Arab news that were copied from regional newspapers. Examples include news of the political situation in Jerusalem during the British Mandate, and the pan-Arab movement led by Haj Mohammed Amin Al Husseini to secure the independence of Palestine (Obaid, 2000).

With the introduction of radio news broadcasts, the 1940s through to the early 1960s witnessed a growth in news production in the Trucial States, which saw the emergence of young male writers whose writings were influenced by the Arab nationalism movement and the Arabs' demand for independence from British colonialism. As a result, modern journalism was born and waves of male journalists, in particular, emerged to form the early press movement in the then Trucial States. These included Humaid Nasser Al Owais and Abdullah Salem Al Omran, who created the *Al Diyar*¹¹ newspaper in 1961 using a stencil design as a form of print (Nafadi, 1996, p.40).

With this in mind, it is notable that the press movement has gone through different stages that have shaped the news culture in the Emirates. The first was the press and the rulers, who generously allocated budgets to develop the media infrastructure, and used it as a tool to support political and economic agendas, while avoiding criticism. The second was the press and colonization, in which the editorial content criticized the British protectorate and shed light on issues like the political cupidity of the Iranians¹², and that of the Americans in the area after the discovery of oil. The third stage was the press and oil, which presented an opportunity for financial growth to local media corporations through advertising space in dedicated economic supplements, that attracted wealthy merchants and western companies (mainly car dealers and oil manufacturers) throughout the 1970s and onward (Ezzat, 1983). The three stages of the press in the United Arab Emirates are discussed at length in chapter four.

¹⁰ Arabic for 'chickpeas' (النخى).

¹¹ Arabic for 'homeland' (الديار).

¹² The Iranians clung to the historical fact that the peninsula, from a political perspective, is Persian not Arabian, and the name dispute was evident in the early wave of newspapers that debated this issue until 1958 (Ezzat, 1983, p.100).

In spite of this, education dedicated to young girls and women, as well as the launch of state-backed women's associations, provided a sense of empowerment for Emirati women, who began to join the workforce, though with a limited presence. Even after the modernization of Emirati institutions, Emirati women are, in the main, still relegated to performing traditional duties, sustaining the social values that are rooted in the tribal patriarchal system. Examining the Arab patriarchal system (1996), Palestinian intellectual Hisham Sharabi referred to the new politically modernized system as 'neopatriarchy'. In his book *Le Néopatriarcat*, he wrote: '[t]he processes of modernization in the Arab world cannot render the mechanisms of the patriarchal system obsolete but can only dress them up in new garments. Even if the patriarchal system changes its socio-political face, it still believes in the superiority of men and denies women's rights' (cited in Al Orami, 2011, p.85).

Still, the authoritarian tribal society did not stop state educated Emirati women from speaking up about their rights through journalism. Early examples include Hessa Al Ossaily, who became the first Emirati radio and television host working for Abu Dhabi's radio station and television in 1972; Mouzah Khamis, who became the first Emirati columnist writing for *Sawt Al Umma*¹³ newspaper in 1980; Mouzah Matar, the first Emirati journalist to be recruited by the Sharjah-based *Al Khaleej* newspaper in 1982; and Mariam Youssef, who became the first Emirati media graduate from the College of Communications at Cairo University in 1979. Gradually, the number of Emirati female journalists increased over the 80s and 90s, according to the UAE Journalists' Association, to reach 163 by 2014 (Al Bakour, 2014).

1.3 The Research's Aims and Objectives

1. Investigate media development in the Emirates, from historical and legal perspectives.
2. Examine the socio-cultural factors that challenge Emirati women journalists.
3. Assess the influence of the tribal patriarchal system in defining Emirati women's social roles.

¹³ Arabic for 'voice of the nation' (صوت الأمة).

4. Investigate the impact of gender dynamics on Emirati women's presence in the field of journalism.

This study will highlight themes that are significantly under-examined in relation to the Emirates, including both gender dynamics and self-censorship in the newsroom. It will also emphasize the influence of patriarchy in determining the socio-cultural challenges that Emirati women endure within a distinctive tribal context, which is different to the social context of Middle Eastern Arab societies¹⁴. This factor has not been investigated before in Arab or Western gender and media related studies on the Emirates. Hence, it will be the first empirical study, prepared by an Emirati researcher with academic and professional backgrounds in mass communication and PR, to use ethnography with the aim of examining these themes and providing evidence on the media landscape, press law, newsroom practices, and gender politics in the Emirates.

1.4 Breakdown of Chapters

This study is divided into eight chapters. The first chapter, the introduction, highlights the framework of the empirical research with an overview of the press in the Emirates, the aims and objectives of the research, and the methodologies used, to argue about the issue of Emirati women's misrepresentation in the media industry from socio-cultural perspectives.

The second chapter, the literature review, presents the theoretical frameworks surrounding gender, women and nation-building, newsroom practises, power relations, orthodoxy, strategies of domination, and their influence in shaping the system of tribal patriarchalism in the Arab Gulf States in general, and in the Emirates in particular. This chapter revolves around three distinctive themes: (1) tribalism and family in the Gulf; (2) women, journalism and newsroom practises; and (3) women and nation-building.

The third chapter gives a comprehensive explanation of this study's qualitative, in-depth methodology, which has been used to investigate three specific issues about

¹⁴ The Arab Gulf societies (GCC countries) share a similar social context to that of the Emirates due to the dominance of a tribal culture.

media in the Emirates that remain significantly under-examined: (1) self-censorship practises in the newsroom; (2) gender dynamics and the attitudes about gender roles experienced by women journalists; and (3) the link between patriarchy and the empowerment of women journalists in the Emirates.

In order to investigate these issues rigorously, two types of methodology were applied: ethnography, using participant observation, to detect the newsroom culture at two local media corporations in Abu Dhabi and Dubai; and using semi-structured interviews to document the personal stories of 40 Emirati and Arab expat male and female journalists. The third chapter also explains at length the structure of these research methodologies, and the challenges faced by the researcher with a number of journalists, who declined participation in the semi-structured interviews for fear of voicing their concerns about the practise of self-censorship, oppressive media law, and enduring sexism in the newsroom.

Before presenting the findings of the observations and the semi-structured interviews, the fourth chapter will examine the history of government control over the media and how experiments at Abu Dhabi and Dubai media outlets came about and transpired. It will also examine the code of ethics and journalism practises in the Emirates and analyse the media industry as an appropriate employer, with regards to the practise of shadowing.

The fifth chapter analyses, in detail, the first part of the study's findings and presents an analytical argument contrasting Emirati women's experience in journalism with that of their female counterparts elsewhere. In so doing it reveals which elements of newsroom practises are related to gender and which are not. This chapter also investigates the socio-cultural restrictions and the intentional institutionalized engagements inside the newsroom that disempower Emirati female journalists, thus putting them at a disadvantage in relation to their male colleagues. This critical debate engages with two key themes: (1) elements of gendered newsroom practises; and (2) elements of non-gendered newsroom practises.

Chapter six analyses the second part of the findings of the research, with regard to how gender as an identity marker intersects with others, such as tribe, family, and

class in the Emirates. It also considers the impact of 'tribal patriarchy' (Sharabi, 1988) as a socio-political system imposed on Emirati journalists. Data are presented that reflect the respondents' experiences in terms of their 'bargaining with patriarchy'.

Chapter seven is focused on the third and final part of the findings of the research. It explains the historical progression of Emirati women's societal role before being integrated into the Emirati state's nation building scheme. The chapter addresses the anomalies that have arisen with the Emirati state's approach to empowering Emirati women whilst holding on to tradition in the face of rapid social change. It appears that Emirati women are rendered the carriers of the so-called 'traditions' that those in power select and reinvent to suit their own purposes. The chapter revolves around two distinctive themes: (1) assessing the Emirati women's situation before 1971; and (2) oil wealth, the Emirati state and the integration of women.

The final chapter of this study, chapter eight, examines the research findings against the backdrop of the formation of tribal patriarchy as a system in the Emirates and its ramifications for Emirati women journalists, in particular. It will look at the influence of this system in shaping a distinct Emirati mindset and gender roles within a unique socio-cultural background, and thus, its influence in creating a distinctive media culture with principles and understandings that are very different from the media culture and ethics in the West.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

Understanding the complexity that engulfs the media environment and journalistic practise in the United Arab Emirates requires, primarily, an anthropological engagement with the country's political identity and ambitions, its social values, culture, and heritage. These features remain deeply influenced by the dominance of Islam. Every aspect of Emirati life reflects the dominance of this orthodoxy, including political practise, law-making, inheritance, ownership, decision-making, and above all hierarchy, resulting in the formation of an authoritative, tribal and patriarchal society that is often in conflict with modernity.

As a consequence, the sociology of news-making in the Emirates is inextricably linked with a particular religious and political identity that revolves around patriotism, nationalism, and loyalty to authority. All media platforms, including digital or social media, are being integrated to function not only as a source of news information, but also as a source of guidance; instilling national identity discourses, emphasizing the importance of preserving the UAE's unique culture and traditions, and maintaining its social cohesion for sustainability and security.

This chapter has been structured to contextualize this research and its findings within a theoretical framework, with the aim of examining the impact of these on women's identity and on their socially constructed roles, and to provide an in-depth investigation of their participation in the field of media as well as their contribution to creative literature and national development, in general. To this end, three key themes will be addressed: (1) tribalism and family in the Gulf; (2) women, journalism and newsroom practises; and (3) women and nation-building.

Before moving forward to the three key themes, it is relevant to define and discuss in detail three powerful notions that underpin this study and will be frequently used in order to understand the social composition and socio-political system as well as

gender discourse in the Arab Gulf societies as a whole and in Emirati society, in particular. The three notions are tribalism, patriarchy, and gender.

To begin with, the social composition of the Arab Gulf societies consists of three categories of tribes that are distinguished by distinctive genealogies, political allies, and economic power. The first category, according to Herb (1999), is the *asil* [in Arabic] tribes, or the ascriptive elite, who claim recognized descent from noble or pure tribes, however distant in the past. The ruling families and urban notables, as well as bedouins with pure descent¹⁵, belong to this category: they are noted for their wealth, education, and social prestige (cited in Herb, 1999, pp.53-54). The second category is known as the *nonasil tribes*, who can trace their descent to a subordinate tribe and have close ties and relations with the ruling families that are often sealed by politically arranged marriages to strengthen tribal loyalty. They are known for their considerable amount of wealth due to their status in the non-oil era as merchants, and hold prominent positions in today's monarchical states, such as the Al Attiya family in Qatar (Ibid., p.56). The third and final category is known as the nontribal population, who cannot trace their descent to a tribe, such as the Shia Muslims, those of African descent, Sunnis of forgotten origins, and immigrants, better known among the Arab Gulf people as *Khadiri*¹⁶ (cited in Herb, 1999, p.53).

The discovery of oil, followed by the economic boom and progress in education and healthcare, altered the social composition of the Arab Gulf societies and introduced stratification based on social class. The *asil* tribes dominate the top of the social pyramid, while the nontribal population, who are much fewer in number, dominates the bottom of the social pyramid and comprises groups such as the Shia Muslims and the *Bidoon* (without citizenship or stateless)¹⁷. They are only able to receive temporary passports and are excluded from employment in the public sector (Davidson, 2013).

¹⁵ Notable Bedouins often hold positions in the Arab Gulf States' military establishments due to their renowned expertise in defence.

¹⁶ Those of *Khadiri* status include people whose ancestors came from other non-Arab places in the Middle East, whose ancestors were expelled from tribes and forced to take up 'impure' occupations out of economic necessity (Herb, 1999, p.55).

¹⁷ It is estimated that there are 100,000 stateless people in The Emirates, who migrated from Iran, lost their legal documents during the sea voyage, and settled in before the federal union of the seven emirates or sheikhdoms in 1971 (Ghazal, 2008).

The latter also includes the Baluch people, whose ancestors migrated from Baluchistan in Pakistan (Ghazal, 2008).

In the centre of the social pyramid, however, another class dominates, that is, the middle class. Mostly, the middle class comprises the *nonasil* or subordinate tribes, who are privileged by enjoying free education funded by the state. This particular privilege has resulted in forming a large group of intellectuals and advocates for reform in the Arab Gulf States. They benefit from privileged employment at prominent state establishments and enjoy financial security from receiving high pay. Such privileges have earned the middle-class social recognition and integration with the upper class, including the monarchy, which they do not oppose as a political system or threaten to overthrow. This is owing to Arab Gulf monarchs taking liberating steps to reform politics after independence and most importantly, holding fair elections and appointing women as state ministers. This step alone, as asserted by Herb (1999), is characteristic of a monarchical path toward democracy (cited in Herb, 1999, p.16).

This idiosyncratic stratification based on tribal class has shaped the state-society relationship in the Arab Gulf States, impacting on the role of the media and limiting public opinion. The authoritarian leaders of the Arab Gulf States control the state-society relationship and obtain loyalty among supporters from the *asil* and *nonasil* tribes by distributing economic resources in the form of private or public goods, lowering tax rates, and distributing wealth in the form of income or high pay across society (Stockmann, 2013, p.28). This type of control, which is also practised in other authoritarian regimes, like China and Singapore, minimises public demands and guarantees public support for the political system. Male and female journalists alike have been instrumental in creating this support for the system in order to sustain economic interests and avoid the coercive arm of the state being brought into action, as described by Shirin Rai (Sakr, 2004). As a result, male and female journalists are forced to practise self censorship so as not to publish news that crosses 'fuzzy red lines' (Ibid., p.9) in fear of imprisonment or deportation.

Nevertheless, the fact that the authoritarian leaders take control over what makes the news and how to produce news in the Arab Gulf States has opened the way towards progressing the status of women through their empowerment. Projecting women's

empowerment in every vital sector, including journalism, has become part of the Arab Gulf States' nation-branding schemes to position themselves favourably on the international scene, a matter that will be investigated in detail in the following chapters. As contended by Kaneva (2011), nation-branding is used as an approach to enhance the competitive advantage of nations in a global market environment. It is considered an augmented form of propaganda and also seen as a post-ideological form of reputation management for nations. As such, it is used to form national identity, culture and governance for nations (cited in Allagui and Al Najjar, 2018, p.70). Another scholar, Alaimo (2016), has argued that government narratives are addressed to the international community for the sake of polishing and improving their reputation as well as to position themselves favorably, rather than reflecting real efforts to support the position of women (Ibid., p.71).

The second notion that needs to be defined and discussed is patriarchy. In Walby's *Theorizing Patriarchy* (1991, p.19) she cites Max Weber's definition of patriarchy as 'a system of government in which men ruled societies through their position as heads of households', and adds her own definition, which sees patriarchy as 'a system of social structures and practices in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women' (1991, p.20).

According to Walby, there are six social structures that institute the system of patriarchy (1991, p.21). The first is the patriarchal mode of production, in which 'women's household labour is expropriated by their husbands' (Ibid.) and in which the housewives are considered as 'the producing class, while husbands are the expropriating class' (Ibid.). The second is 'patriarchal relations in paid work' (Ibid.), in which women are excluded from the 'better forms of work' (Ibid.) and given instead the 'worse jobs' (Ibid.) which are seen to require less skill. Patriarchal relations in the state is third, with the state described as having 'a systematic bias towards patriarchal interests in its policies and actions' (Ibid.), making it both capitalist and racist. The fourth structure is male violence, in which forms of male aggression, such as 'rape, wife beating, [and] sexual harassment' (Ibid.), are systematically ignored and 'legitimated by the state's refusal to intervene...except in exceptional instances' (Ibid.). Patriarchal relations in sexuality is fifth, in which the patriarchal system has determined that heterosexuality is and should be the norm; and sixth is patriarchal relations in

cultural institutions, where 'a set of establishments...create the representation of women within a patriarchal gaze' (Ibid.), in diverse fields such as 'religion, education, and the media'.

The social construction of women's roles and its relation to patriarchy has drawn a particular emphasis on the role of state-backed empowerment campaigns in moulding the social status of women in the Arab Gulf States generally, and in the Emirates specifically, while advancing it through advocating women's rights in education, legislation, and employment. Yet, these social advances were applied top down, and were directly regulated by the state, making social change for Emirati women, in particular, quite challenging due to the direct involvement of the patriarchs in their life, making it impossible for them to attain personal and professional autonomy.

The third and final notion that needs to be defined and discussed is gender. 'Gender is a concept that refers to a system of roles and relationships between women and men, which are determined not by biology, but by the social, political and economic context' (Sikoska, 1999, p.2). It is also 'a process by which individuals are born into male or female become the social categories of men and women through the acquisition of locally defined attributes of masculinity and femininity' (Sikoska, 1999, p.2). Comparably, theorist Judith Butler (1990) explained that gender is rather fabricated, constructed, and sustained as a way of life, defining the term as 'an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through *a stylized repetition of acts*. The effort of gender is produced through the stylization of the body and, hence, must be understood as the mundane way in which bodily gestures, movements, and styles of various kinds constitute the illusion of an abiding gendered life' (cited in N'Guessan, 2011, p.187).

Jenks has argued that the progress of the human mind and the evolution of 'culture' in human civilization throughout history has taken three forms (2003, p.28). The first is the "ideal", in which culture is a state or process of human perfection in terms of certain absolute or universal values' (Ibid.). The second is "documentary", in which culture is the body of intellectual and imaginative work, in which...human thought and experience are variously recorded' (Ibid.). The third is "social", in which culture is a description of a particular way of life, which expresses certain meanings and values

not only in art and learning but also in institutions and ordinary behaviour' (Ibid.). Therefore, the social construction of culture has led to the formation of a distinct, socially constructed gender identity, in which roles and responsibilities, contributions and expectations were defined based on stratification; and in which 'male supremacist cultural expressions', as explained by Karl Marx, were invented and integrated into spiritual myths, rituals, arts, and literature (cited in Bartky, 1990, p.25). As such, gender identity has been universally influenced by cultural notions that are based on power relations and strategies of domination that view women as subordinates, by biology and nature, with less valued physical and psychological attributes than men.

There is evidence, however, of egalitarianism practised before this cultural evolution by Neolithic societies, such as in Çatal höyük in southern Anatolia (7000 B.C.). In her anthropological study about Neolithic societies, Elise Boulding (cited in Lerner, 1986, p.43) explained that:

Each sex developed appropriate skills and knowledge essential for group survival. Woman knew how to transform the raw materials and dead animals into nurturing products. Her skills must have been as manifold as those of man and certainly as essential. Woman, in pre-civilized society, must have been man's equal and may well have felt herself to be his superior.

However, as anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss has argued, with the formation of tribal societies came the subordination of women, in particular through the practise of 'the exchange of women' (cited in Lerner, 1986, p.47),. In *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* (1969), he wrote:

The total relationship of exchange, which constitutes marriage is not established between a man and a woman, but between two groups of men, and the woman figures only as one of the objects in the exchange, not as one of the partners. In acquiescing to the proposed union, she precipitates or allows the exchange to take place, she cannot alter its nature.

Throughout history – from ancient times to the Middle Ages, through to the rise of feminist movements in the eighteenth century – philosophers, existentialists, and psychoanalysts have produced different hypotheses to analyse the emergence of power relations; in particular, a psychological perspective of male supremacy and

domination. Sigmund Freud argued that male aggression drove men to build civilization 'to compensate for their frustration of their sexual instincts in the early childhood' (cited in Lerner, 1986, p.46). Feminist theorist Simone de Beauvoir has also emphasised biology as the basis of male supremacy. In *Le Deuxième Sexe* (*The Second Sex*, 1949), she wrote: 'from the origins of humanity, their biological privilege enabled men to affirm themselves alone as sovereign subjects, they never abdicated this privilege, they alienated part of their existence in Nature and in Woman, but they won it back afterwards' (De Beauvoir, 2011, p.88).

As Lerner has argued, another group of theorists like Susan Brownmiller, Elizabeth Fisher, and Mary O'Brien have also stressed male biological privilege, arguing that 'the domestication of animals taught men their role in procreation and that the practice of the forced mating of animals led men to the idea of rape' (1986, p.46), in an attempt to demonstrate their superiority and dominance. And thus, biological and psychological male aggression, in parallel with the development of patriarchy and militarism as a result of intertribal feuds, increased men's tendency to exercise authority over women. Summarising Boulding's work, Lerner writes that women were bestowed with levels of 'agency' in patriarchal tribal societies, and played crucial roles in various socio-political affairs, including negotiations over 'the exchange of women'. Women, she suggests, were able to 'develop cultural flexibility and sophistication by their intertribal linkage role', and could 'straddle two cultures and learn the ways of both' (1986, p.48).

Numerous psychoanalytical studies have described the formation of gendered personalities based on the concepts of superiority and inferiority; for example, man as a 'noble sex' and woman as 'incidental being' or 'imperfect man', as seen by St. Thomas (De Beauvoir, 2011, p.5). Other studies have also examined the way that historically certain social roles have been envisaged for women, like motherhood and the functions of the obedient daughter and wife. When it comes to motherhood, sociologist Nancy Chodorow (cited in Lerner, 1986, p.44) has claimed that from early on, a child's relationship to its mother differs in particular ways:

Boys and girls learn to expect from women the infinite, accepting love of a mother, but they also associate with women their fear

of powerlessness. In order to find their identity, boys develop themselves as other-than-the-mother; they identify with the father and turn away from emotional expression toward action in the world. Growing girls come to define and experience themselves as continuous with others; their experience of self contains more flexible or permeable ego boundaries.

By doing so, as sociologist Nancy Chodorow claimed, the male and female child come to define selfhood differently and form an ego that establishes a hierarchy of the sexes. Sociologist Pierre Bourdieu made a similar observation. In *La Domination Masculine* (*Masculine Domination*, 1998), he explained that boys must go through a certain psychoanalytic stage to 'break-free of their quasi-symbiosis with their mother and to assert their own sexuality' (Bourdieu, 2001, p.25). Bourdieu continues that boys are encouraged to 'break with the maternal world, from which girls...are exempted – which enables them to live in a kind of continuity with their mothers' (2001, p.26).

As for girls, it is more problematic, since socio-cultural – and religious – subordination is not only imposed on their gender, but on their bodies too, which are viewed and treated by men as sacred, *fitna*¹⁸, and *haram*¹⁹. This weighs them down psychologically, from the age they enter puberty, through adolescence, to womanhood, limiting their experiences and opportunities in life. They are nurtured with a conviction of male superiority and prestige, and that their bodies will be subjected to 'male conquest', as argued by Ania Loomba (2005), who wrote that 'female bodies [symbolize] the conquered land' (cited in N'Guessan, 2011, p.187).

In protofeminist literature, female intellectuals often expressed their disdain for their own bodies, such as in the writings of Christine de Pizan, who lived in Medieval France. In *The Book of the City of Ladies* (1405) (cited in Loomba, 1989, p.93), she wrote:

And I finally decided that God had made a vile creature when He made woman. A great unhappiness and sadness welled up in my heart, for I detested myself and the entire feminine sex, as though we were monstrosities in nature. Alas, God, why did you not let me be born in the world as a man? And in my folly, I

¹⁸ For a brief description, please see the definitions section.

¹⁹ For a brief description, please see the definitions section.

considered myself most unfortunate because God has made me inhabit a female body in this world.

Universally, women have been carrying the dual burdens of the feminine body and the feminine gender. Those who resisted the patriarchal system and male dominance, like eastern and western feminists and existentialists, called for 'consciousness-raising' against discrimination, and pursued equal access to power, rights, and influence. But most of these individuals suffered, such as Doria Shafiq, a pioneering Egyptian journalist, political activist, and feminist thinker, who was labelled by her opponents as the 'Maroon Glacé Boss'²⁰. Doria was put under house arrest by Gamal Abdul Nasser's regime for 18 years, as a consequence of an 11-day food strike that she organized in 1957. The strike was against what she pronounced to the press as 'Nasser's dictatorship', in an attempt to prove his incompetence in running the nation's political and economic affairs and his bid to undermine women's rights, and she demanded his resignation. Isolated, criticized, unemployed, and denied her right to free speech, Doria threw herself from the sixth floor balcony of her Zamalek²¹ flat, committing suicide in September 1975 (Massoud, 2010). Her history and work continue to stir political chaos and fear, to the extent that her name was removed from school textbooks during the presidency of Mohammad Morsi, who was backed by The Muslim Brotherhood (Sadiqi, 2016, p.247).

The notions of tribalism, patriarchy and gender lead to the next set of themes and the arguments presented in the following chapters of this study. Next to be addressed is the evolution of tribalism and patriarchal societies in the Arab Gulf States and in the United Arab Emirates, which have distinct historical, religious, tribal, and socio-cultural attributes. Specifically, there is in-depth examination of the impact of tribalism, patriarchy, and gender on women's status and on journalism practise in the Emirates.

2.1 Tribalism and Family in the Gulf

In order to comprehend this ethnographic study, it is necessary to unpack how the historical tribal Muslim community spanning the Gulf, the Arabian Peninsula, and

²⁰ A French dessert made of sugar candied chestnuts. However, it was used by the opponents of Doria Shafiq to value her beauty instead of her intelligence in mockery.

²¹ An attractive district in Greater Cairo, famed for its exotic gardens and historical palaces.

particularly, the Emirates, evolved into twentieth century patriarchal nations empowered by unprecedented levels of wealth, fuelled by the discovery of oil. Before and after Islam, tribes²² or *qabael* in the Emirates, as well as elsewhere in the Arabian Peninsula, (excluding the MENA region for differences in their formation and cultural characteristics), were divided into three groups. These were coastal tribes, mountain tribes, and desert tribes; each with distinctive genealogies, traditions, rituals, and philosophies, that form the individual's pride and dignity or shame and dishonour. An example of proud ancestry is the *Bani Murrah* tribe, which traces its lineage back to a famous figure named *Murrah*, who lived before The Prophet (Metz, 1994, p.37). An example of a less privileged ancestry would be the mountain tribe of *Bani Riyam*, who lost their reputation and position as one of the most important tribes in the area after planning a failed coup against the former Sultan of Oman in 1959 (Peterson, 1977, p.2).

Moreover, people of the Arabian Peninsula and Trucial States (The United Arab Emirates today) were isolated from the rest of the region, and with little communication from farther afield. The political and economic atmosphere – as we know it today – was permeated with tribal feuds and disputes over leadership and land. The only foreign visitors included missionaries who aimed to evangelize the Peninsula²³, such as The Wheel from New Jersey (USA), whose volunteers, led by Reverend Samuel Zwemer, had travelled the desert in search of nomads since 1889 (Sonbol, 2012, p.242). There were also adventurous western explorers, who were drawn by the mystique of the Arabian Desert and the Bedouin's traditions and hospitality. These famously included Thomas Edward Lawrence, known as Lawrence of Arabia, and Sir Wilfred Patrick Thesiger, who was widely known as Mubarak bin London. Meanwhile, the presence of British colonialism along the Peninsula's coastline was merely symbolic, aimed at maintaining control of the naval route from the Persian sea passage to the Strait of Hormuz, and the open ocean that led to other British colonies. The Peninsula was an arid zone, mapped as The Empty Quarter. Its inhabitants were

²² Tribal inhabitants occupied this land for about 7,500 years, dating back to 5000 B.C., and were dependent on pastoralism, pearl diving, fishing, and hunting in the eastern mountains (Al Abed and Hellyer, 2001, pp. 7-28).

²³ Preaching the Bible, in particular, was unsuccessful due to the lack of education and modern school facilities, as well as the difficulty of teaching the English language to the locals, who showed no interest. Therefore, foreign missionaries offered medical care and taught young women basic handcrafts to sell in the marketplace (Sonbol, 2012, p.242).

‘Bedu’ or ‘Bedouins’ as labelled by the colonizers, who were stereotypically represented, as described by Emirati author Mohammed Al Murr in his book *Life is Given and Life is Taken Away* (1994), as ‘sinister harbingers of violence and banditry’ (cited in Hawker, 2013, p.5).

Yet, people of the Arabian Peninsula and Trucial States were distinguished for their tribal loyalty, which was linked by patrilineal ties to religion, tradition, and heritage, as Sir Wilfred Patrick Thesiger noted after several encounters with the Bedu of the Trucial States in a 1979 recorded interview (Attenborough, 1979) with BBC Radio Four:

I think the harder the life, the finer the type. And I certainly felt this about the Bedu. When I went there, I felt that the difficulty was going to be living up physically to the hardships of their life. But, on the contrary, it was the difficulty of meeting their high standards: their generosity, their patience, their loyalty, their courage and all these things. And they had a quality of nobility.

Subsequently, women of the Arabian Peninsula and Trucial States were confined to preserving and maintaining one particular moral custom within the tribe, honor (or *sharaf* in Arabic), which had to be reflected in their manners as family members, as married women, as mothers, and as supporters to their husbands in all the complementary work that they took part in outside the home to survive, such as selling clothes, food, and fish. In his memoir *The Arab of the Desert* (1949), British Lieutenant Colonel Harold Richard Patrick Dickson observed of the tribal custom of honour: ‘[t]rue it is that you can make a Badawin²⁴ man or woman do pretty well anything in this world except sacrifice his or her honor, by the offer of money’ (Soffan, 1980, p.18).

The influence of tribal honor and other customs for generations, even before the dawn of Islam in the Peninsula and the reforms that Prophet Mohammed introduced, made women submissive, a social behaviour that Downing and Roush (1985) referred to as ‘passive acceptance’, in which women come to believe that they are inferior, secondary to men, and accustom themselves to traditional duties (cited in Al Malki et al., 2012, p.112).

²⁴ Another early term used by Westerners in reference to the Bedu.

Examination of the Emirati tribes that have been subjected to various external political and economic pressures during the long history of British protectorate (from 1820 until 1971), reveals that they were able to preserve tribal honour and cohesion, a central pillar for protecting genealogical identity. Internal political, social, and economic complications were resolved among the senior members of a tribe as if it were a family affair. Women, too, were included in the discussions and decision-making processes, albeit behind the scenes, especially in terms of arranging intermarriages for tribal political allegiances, which clearly indicates that tribalism in the Emirates was both patriarchal and matriarchal. Emirati genealogist Saeed Al Suwaidi (cited in Al Hashemi, 2013) explained:

We did not have ID cards or passports for identification. It was the tribe's name that indicated who you were. Check out the old maps of the area [before the country's federal union]. You will find it marked with the tribes' names. For example, *Bani Yas* [a desert tribe] would be written in large font, marking the whole area in Liwa²⁵ where they lived. The same would be true for *Al Manaseer* [a desert tribe], *Al Quwasem* [a coastal tribe] and all the tribes.

For some tribes, nicknames would be given in honour of a powerful woman, who would often take on the tribe's political, social, and economic affairs until her son inherited the role of the tribe's head, as in the cases of the '*qoom* [people of] bin Ftaim, *qoom* bin Eshbah, [and] *qoom* bin Mahra, and so on' (Al Hashemi, 2013).

The table below shows the first census (1968) of the tribal, nomad, and semi-nomadic communities that lived in this area, including *qoom* Bani Yas, Al Sharquiyyin, Shihuh-Habus, Al Ali, Al Qawasim, Al Manaseer, Al Za'ab, Al Dhawahir, Al Mazari', Al Bu Shamis, Bani Kitab, Al Nuaim, Al Naqbiyyin, and Al Awamir (Martin, 2014, p.90).

Emirate	Tribal population	Tribal percentage
Ras Al Khaimah	17,941	74%

²⁵ Liwa is an oasis town located 150 kilometres from Abu Dhabi.

Abu Dhabi	17,750	38%
Sharjah	12,769	40%
Fujairah	9,138	94%
Dubai	7,864	13%
Umm Al Qaiwain	3,209	86%
Ajman	1,611	38%

Apart from tribal cohesion, orthodoxy comes second as a pillar in the moral affinities of all tribes in the Emirates, making significant departures from ancient traditional practises and customs difficult and problematic for the new generation, especially women. Islam has been unfairly accused of being 'anti-women' (Soffan, 2017, p.14), when in fact, many of the repressive laws against women were introduced and reproduced by tribal customs and practises that predate Islam. An example of religious equality was even observed during The Prophet's time, when men and women gathered in mosques for prayer and attended political assemblies for consultation (known legally as *Shura*), without segregation (Soffan, 2017, p.15).

Segregation and veiling, in fact, were widespread customs that tribal societies in the Arabian Peninsula imposed on women, even before the dawn of Islam. Indeed, Prophet Mohammed advised women to dress modestly only because men treated them as sexual commodities and concubines during the pre-Islamic period. This is in conflict with how some Eastern and Western orientalist and theologians have interpreted this particular phenomenon including the Earl of Cromer, who censured the low status of Muslim women in order to criticize Islam as a religion in general (Soffan, 2017, p.23).

Criticism of the religion and its association with the low status of women, in particular, continued throughout the twentieth century. For instance, Iranian writer Sadegh

Hedayat (1936) (cited in Milani, 2011, p.64), who found salvation in embracing the Zoroastrian faith, wrote:

Every aspect of life and thought, including women's condition, changed after Islam. Enslaved by men, women were confined to the home. Polygamy, injection of fatalistic attitude, mourning, sorrow and grief led people to seek solace in magic, witchcraft, prayer, and supernatural beings.

Advocates of Islam have defended the scripture and prophetic tradition that were originally initiated to foster tolerance. For example, in his book *Rawdat Al Muhibbin* [Garden of Lovers], which was written in the thirteenth-century, Imam Ibn Qayyim explained with Quranic evidence that men were created weak by God, unable to resist women's appeals and charms. 'Meditating on the Quran verse, "He [God] created the human being weak," he [Imam Ibn Qayyim] interpreted it as meaning that it is the man who is fragile because if he looks at women, he can't restrain himself' (Mernissi, 2011, p.10).

The exaggeration of segregation and veiling in tribal societies, which is still in practise today, albeit minimally in modern Arab and Muslim societies, was in fact developed as a fashionable practise in ancient Persia and was soon adopted as a sign of esteem and reputation by the Muslims, Christians, and Jews of the upper class, who settled in the Arab East and the Arabian Peninsula (Soffan, 2017, p.15). Such practises were further anchored by the widespread presence of extreme Islamic theologies such as *Salafism*, followed by *Wahabism*²⁶ in the eighteenth-century, and were embraced by the tribal societies, generation after generation, in the Arabian Peninsula and the Emirates, remaining intact in the face of modernity during the mid-twentieth-century (Peck, 2008, p.314). Elaborating on this subject, Lebanese scholar Layal Ftouni explained that, influenced by the thoughts of the *Wahhabi* scholars in the Arab Gulf States, 'the patriarchal male elite had deployed the science of *Isnad*²⁷ to interpret The Prophet's Hadith and the Qur'anic *suras* in a manner that served their own political and sexual interests' (cited in Ftouni, 2012, p.165). She added (Ibid: 165) that:

²⁶ A revivalist movement formed by Sunni theologians in pursuit of Islamic purity.

²⁷ The chain of narrators attesting to the historical authenticity of a particular hadith or the prophetic quotes.

The institution of the *hijab* and the segregation of the sexes, as part and parcel of Islam, is a patriarchal fabrication that was later maintained during the colonial period by Arab nationalists, and is maintained today by some Islamist groups as a way to secure their dominion in the face of change.

However, the newfound oil wealth dramatically changed the conditions and lifestyle of Emirati tribal society, which saw benefits from the government including free education, inexpensive housing and healthcare services, and employment opportunities. This change has resulted in an exodus by many tribes from the interior desert and oases to settlements, replacing tribal cohesion as a social unit with a western model of the modern family. Free education and employment opportunities, along with the government's social campaigns to empower women and become a gender-equal society (which started in the early 1970s), have extended the tribal society's comprehension of the outside world and their acceptance, albeit gradual, of women breaking from traditional roles, joining the workforce as equal partners, and speaking up in all matters that affect the country's growth and progress (Peterson, 1977, p. 297).

Nonetheless, Emirati women cannot depend solely on state-backed campaigns for their empowerment, especially with the increase of Emirati women's participation in politics and the launch of the Gender Balance Council. Based on the ethnographic findings of this study, which will be discussed at length in the following chapters, these campaigns are deficient for a number of reasons. The first reason is that most opportunities for emancipation in the Emirates are reserved for upper class women with strong familial, particularly male, networks that are close to the royal court. The second reason is that the state campaigns are being pressured by the international community's standards of gender equality, which are ignorant of complex, predominantly domestic, labour and legal issues. The third reason is inadequate education in gender studies, which is excluded from the school curriculum, resulting in widening the gender gap in the Emirates. Fourth is the persistent refusal to re-interpret *tafasir* literature of Islamic scholars and to re-examine the religious scripture in order to adopt new policies on women's rights. The fifth, final reason, is the ignorance of Emirati women to learn and raise awareness about their own rights, something that has triggered a divide, as well as resistance to change, making Emirati

women even more patriarchal than Emirati men by upholding the same values and prejudices.

Under these circumstances, orthodoxy and the tribal patriarchal culture are still influencing the political, economic, and social spheres in the Arab Gulf States, in general, and in the Emirates, in particular. These are directing the construction of Emirati people's minds, and controlling the development of ethical and professional practises in highly important fields such as journalism, delaying Emirati people's progress towards freedom of expression and choice, and delaying the full empowerment of Emirati women, in particular.

2.2 Women, Journalism and Newsroom Practises

In the oil rich Arab Gulf States, achievement of absolute gender equality is still considered a 'political aspiration only' by its opponents, for it is overshadowed in patriarchal societies by enshrined gender-defined roles, expectations, and socio-cultural norms which are often given religious legitimacy. The culture of tribalism in these states, including the Emirates, has produced power relations and strategies for domination that subordinate women. These impact upon women acting as decision makers in terms of being solely responsible for their own choices in life. The results create on-going conflict over their role in various fields, particularly in journalism, where societal norms are deeply embedded within mainstream cultural institutions that uphold patriarchy and privilege men's experiences (cited in Sadig, 2019, p. 297). As a consequence, women's expertise, interests, and issues are limited to the private sphere (Ibid., p.297).

The emergence of women's liberation movements in some Arab Gulf States, like Kuwait, has allowed women journalists to resist tribal patriarchal oppression by voicing their concerns openly over women's political participation and civil rights. However, some of them have met with grave consequences owing to their deviating from the socio-cultural norms. For instance, Hidaya Al Salem (1936-2001), one of Kuwait's pioneer women journalists, a feminist and chief editor of *Al Majalis*²⁸ magazine, was shot by a policeman while she was on her way to a conference organized by The

²⁸ Arabic for 'courts' or 'reception halls' (المجالس).

Women's Association of Kuwait. 'The reason of [for] the murder was based upon tribal honour, as she was perceived to have insulted [in a column] the women of Al Awazem²⁹ tribe' (Sabah, 2013, p.98). As in the case of Hidaya, the lack of free will and free speech, has disempowered women journalists and led to the retrenchment of journalism practises due to a 'freedom deficit' (Sakr, 2004). This was described by the *Arab Human Development Report (AHDR)* published in 2002 with the support of the United Nations. This particular report revealed a set of indicators concerning 'voice and accountability', which included media independence: women's voices were reported as those most repressed of all (cited in Sakr, 2004, p.4).

Another form of oppression for Arab Gulf women has been brought to light, pertaining not to economic or political life, but rather their psychological status. "Psychic alienation", a term used by revolutionist Frantz Fanon, has been sorted into three categories based on women's experiences by Bartky: 'stereotyping, cultural domination, and sexual objectification' (1990, p.23). According to Bartky, '[t]o be psychologically oppressed is to be weighed down in your mind; it is to have a harsh dominion exercised over your self-esteem. The psychologically oppressed become their own oppressors; they come to exercise harsh dominion over their own self-esteem. Differently put, psychological oppression can be regarded as the 'internalization of intimations of inferiority' (1990, p.22). Bartky (1990, p.23) elaborates that:

Psychological oppression is institutionalized and systematic; it serves to make the work of domination easier by breaking the spirit of the dominated and by rendering them incapable of understanding the nature of those agencies responsible for their subjugation. This allows those who benefit from the established order of things to maintain their ascendancy with more appearance of legitimacy and with less recourse to overt acts of violence than they might otherwise require.

As a result, attempts to launch feminist movements and non-profit organizations (NGOs) by pioneer women journalists and intellectuals to liberate women's political and legal rights in the Arab Gulf States did not change the socially constructed

²⁹ An influential, authentic Bedouin tribe that has a long history of tribal alliance with the Al Sabah ruling family in Kuwait.

patriarchal ideologies that interpreted the male-female relation as the oppressor versus the oppressed; the superior versus the inferior. In Kuwait, for instance, journalist and activist Nouria Al Saddani established the Arab Women's Development Society (AWDS) in 1963. The targeted aims were to: challenge tribal and social structures, demand women's rights in education and political practise, and to call for changes in women's status within the Kuwaiti family law (Doumato and Posusney, 2003). Her activism raised awareness among middle-class Kuwaiti women and highlighted the class differentials after she gained support from the upper class women. At the same time, the impacts of her work on promoting gender equality and radical feminism spread fear among opponents, especially among the extreme Sunni fundamentalists or *Salafis*³⁰. As a result, AWDS was closed down by the government and Noria was forced into exile in 1975 (Ibid., p.224).

The emergence of capitalism and technologically advanced societies, in which Arab Gulf women were granted education and employment opportunities to a variable degree by the state, have only increased their exposure to sexism, particularly in the form of verbal harassment, which will be covered in the findings chapters. They also experienced discrimination and misogyny that negatively influenced their performance, creativity, and aspirations by making them adhere to customary submission to patriarchal norms. Feminist Julia Kristeva referred to this situation concerning women's social identity as 'femininity as marginality' (cited in N'Guessan, 2011, p.193). According to Kristeva, a woman 'can only exist negatively. She that which cannot be represented, that which is not spoken, that which remains outside naming and ideologies' (Ibid.).

This is evident in one of the most sought after professions, media (print and broadcast), where women's sexuality is exploited, while at the same time their creative outputs e.g. literature and their voices are continually silenced by the monopoly that men hold in the field worldwide. Many stories on this subject have emerged from the Middle East, where patriarchal ideologies are still widely dominant, influencing the sociology of news production and the portrayal of Arab women in the news. For instance, when Lebanon launched LBC and Future satellite televisions in 1996,

³⁰ For a brief description, please see the definitions section.

executives hired 'women anchors in low-cut attire in a bid to woo [Arab] Gulf audiences, who were unaccustomed to seeing women on their own television screens' (Sakr, 2007, as cited in Rahbani, 2010, p.94). In an interview, Future TV anchor Najat Sharrafeddine said: 'I remember a Lebanese director telling female presenters that viewers wanted to see them, not listen to them. Gibran Tueni once told one of his reporters on Al Nahar [channel] that TV works according to *The Star* system, empowering women through their beauty' (Ibid.).

In the developed, fundamentalist, and tribal Arab Gulf nations, women's representation in the media is also inadequate; while their creative literature is mostly invisible and restricted due to the prevailing patriarchal culture and social norms that are influenced by the dominant religion, Islam. As I argue in the following chapters, the inadequacy regarding Emirati women's representation in the media, in particular, is not only influenced by the distinctive societal obstacles of the patriarchal society. Four key factors including: basic gender stereotyping, limited opportunities to hold leading positions within media corporations, horizontal segregation, and gender clustering inside the newsroom are also salient. In fact, the female journalism workforce in the UK and other Western countries is not immune to these factors either, as author Suzanne Franks debated in her book *Women and Journalism* (Franks, 2013). In the UK, for instance, female journalists who succeed in reporting political news are often mistreated and can be viewed by their male peers as either a "newshound" or a "soft features bunny" (Franks, 2013). This was the case with Kate Ironside, who worked as a political correspondent for the *Daily Express* in 1988. She recalled being trapped in 'an aggressive, bullying culture' inside the newsroom, and was only appointed by the editor Nick Lloyd as 'a pretty young thing [who] would appeal to the MPs' (cited in Franks, 2013, p.26). Generally, the bullying culture has impacted on the mental health and performance of female journalists, including Emirati ones as the findings chapters will reveal. These women feel pressured to submit to the masculine newsroom practises, particularly those women who want to cover politics or economics. This was as documented in a report published by the International Women's Media Foundation (IWMF) in 2000 (Chambers et al., 2004). In one survey, a female editor noted that 'women are conditioned to respond to news in a "male" pattern. It's how many of us avoid being labeled "too soft" and get the positions we have' (cited in Chambers et al., 2004, p.91).

Another dominant factor is the practise of censorship in the Arab Gulf States' media corporations, including international media agencies. In these organisations, male and female journalists adhere to the practise of self-censorship. Every media platform is used by the Arab Gulf States' authoritarian regimes as a propaganda tool to control the flow of news and guide public opinion in order to sustain political stability within their societies. As argued by Davidson (2013), all of the six monarchical states' ranking in the *World Press Freedom Index*, as compiled by Reporters without Borders, have dropped recently, with Kuwait ranking in 78th position. The Emirates, Qatar, and Oman were ranked below dozens of African dictatorships in 112th, 114th, and 117th positions respectively. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain were ranked among the very worst countries in the world (cited in Davidson, 2013, p.146).

The censorship strategies used in the Arab Gulf States include: media surveillance, internet filtering, and establishing censorship departments to monitor the local media corporations as well as the international media agencies. Fear and fierce criticism of these strategies have emerged not only from international media observers, but also from locals and resident expats. In a poll commissioned by the BBC's Doha Debates in 2011, it was revealed that more than half of the Gulf respondents were 'too afraid to speak out against their rulers' (cited in Davidson, 2013, p.146). Meanwhile, in the same poll, nationals of North African Arab Spring states expressed optimism about their freedoms (Ibid.). Unlike other Arab Gulf States that use violence and brutality to oppress the voices of its people, like Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, the Emirates has implemented vigilant schemes to control the media because, as Davdison pointed out, its non-oil economic sectors such as tourism rely increasingly on maintaining a sound international reputation (Ibid., p.148).

After withdrawing the imprisonment of journalists in 2009 as an act from the 40-year-old media law (first released in 1980), the Emirates introduced a new regulation to pressure journalists and media corporations by paying massive fines to the authorities if they cross the red lines or overstep the mark, for example, 'disparaging senior government officials or the royal family', or 'misleading the public and harming the economy' (cited in Davidson, 2013, p.149). Reporting on the new regulation, Human Rights Watch (2009) stated that '[it would] regulate the news media unlawfully by restricting free expression and would unduly interfere with the media's ability to report

on sensitive subject' (Ibid.). In addition, it added that 'the pending law includes provisions that would grant the government virtually complete control in deciding who is allowed to work as a journalist and which media organizations are allowed to operate in the country' (Ibid.).

2.3 Women and Nation-Building

Arab media studies have produced a very interesting compendium of research on media, culture, and society in the Arab region and the wider Middle East, yet little research has been conducted to examine the nature of news cultures in the Arab Gulf, a geographic area often neglected from studies, with little controlled western press coverage on its restricted media law, journalism, and censorship practises. In the Arab Gulf, the practise of journalism differs from that of the Middle East and the West, where the levels of free speech and free press are considerably higher. The dominance of authoritarianism in the Arab Gulf (and in the Emirates which shares the same political environment), has instilled an awareness of nationalism and patriotic values in journalists. These values define the news culture in the Arab Gulf and the Emirates explicitly, influencing journalistic practises, manipulating the representation of women as a symbol of an idealized femininity, and Islamizing feminism through pro-state propaganda and projects, a phenomenon that has been generally under examined, but has been investigated in this study.

Theorists have produced different definitions to explain nationalism. Ernest Gellner (1983) (cited in Pomeroy, 2017, p.1) defined it as:

The striving to make culture and polity congruent, to endow a culture with its own political roof, and not more than one roof at that. In this definition, the homogenous culture, organized within a government structure, is often based on language, geography, ethnicity, or a historical past [whether real or imagined] that binds the community together.

Nationalism is a crucial propaganda tool, often used as a governmental mechanism in the Arab Gulf and Emirati mass media outlets and technologies to maintain the state's political power, unify public opinion with that of the authoritarian state, and protect the society from external threats and crises. This was the case in the Arab Gulf and Emirati press during the time of the Iranian revolution in 1979 (in fear of the Shiite power

expansion), during Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, and, more recently during the aftermath of the 2010 Arab Spring, which saw the religious divide between the Sunnis and Shiites in Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, and the war in Yemen against terrorism.

In *Not By The Sword Alone* (2014) (cited in Pomeroy, 2017, pp.14-15), author Camber Warren argued that:

Mass media technologies facilitate the maintenance of stability and sovereignty by altering the structural forces operating on the production and dissemination of normative appeals to national unity and state loyalty. Mass communication technologies allow leaders to convert nationalist images, narratives, and symbols into elements of common knowledge, which are known by all to have been seen by all, and which thereby achieve even greater normative impact.

Through this manipulative tool, the authoritarian state ensures the creation of an ideal citizen, convinced of the state's democracy by the seriousness of news broadcasted by the local media outlets. Explaining the characteristics of an ideal 'informed' citizen, Van Zoonen wrote: 'an informed citizenry which relies on information, facts and rational argumentation for its political sense-making, is considered a prerequisite for modern politics and democracy, and this can only come about by properly functioning news media' (cited in Mellor, 2007, p.78).

However, political nationalism and the practise of patriotic journalism have negative implications as they restrict free speech and increase the level of censorship. In a 1996 study entitled *Nationalism and the Marketplace of Ideas*, authors Jack Snyder and Karen Ballentine offered a qualitative analysis to explain the relationship between nationalism and press freedom, which they associate with the economic market (cited in Pomeroy, 2017, p.15). As described by Pomeroy (Ibid.) Snyder and Ballentine argue that:

Control of information in the media can be problematic in democratizing societies by identifying the media as advertising or soliciting political support through nationalist myth making. They (Snyder and Ballentine) demonstrate how monopolies on

the supply of information can allow a government to disseminate a nationalistic narrative with few challengers.

Furthermore, the practise of self-censorship among journalists increases as a result of the dominance of patriotic journalism in the news culture, leading them to deliver biased news to the public, with information controlled and provided by the state. This is not only apparent in the media of the Arab Gulf and the Emirates, but was also clear in the US press coverage before the invasion of Iraq in 2003, when a number of journalists challenged the claims of President Bush's administration that Iraq had weapons of mass destruction. American journalists Peter Arnett and Phil Donahue were fired by NBC channel for their outspoken negative reports and remarks concerning the war at a time when 'nearly two-thirds of all [news] sources were categorized as pro-war' (Pomeroy, 2017, p.19).

The rules for correspondents are imposed by the state, in times of stability and in times of crisis, to shape the public's perception of 'loyalty' to the leadership, and to shape its perception of the 'enemy' and the threat it represents to their well-being and safety. However, these rules increase controversial press coverage by restricting journalists' access to accurate information, compelling them to write biased 'pro-state' reports, preventing the public from learning the truth, or speaking openly in an attempt to avoid dividing public opinion, as well as denying the public from achieving 'political maturity' and 'knowledge' of its affairs.

Today, this is realized through the Emirati 'pro-state' coverage of the war in Yemen, in which statements like 'the UAE will continue to fight the "global enemy" of Al Qaeda,' or [the UAE] 'will cleanse Yemen of all terror outfits,' (cited in Trew, 2018) are released to the local and foreign press. It can also be seen in the state's attempts to control free expression and prevent, to some extent, the public from criticizing its handling of political matters. An example is the jailing of academic dissenters and right activists³¹, who are often described by the state in trusted local media outlets as aiming to 'spread tendentious ideas that would sow sedition, sectarianism and hatred and harm national

³¹ Most of these academic dissenters and right activists were influenced by The Muslim Brotherhood ideology, and planned to overthrow legitimate governments in the GCC as an aftermath of The Arab Spring.

unity and social peace, as well as harming the state's reputation and inciting disobedience' (Deutsche Welle International Broadcast, 2018).

In the past, 'pro-state' press coverage was also imposed on journalists to shape public opinion and perception of the 'enemy', as explained by Nobel Prize journalist John Steinbeck (cited in Pomeroy, 2017, pp.23-24), who wrote about the 1942 Code of Wartime Practices for the American Press:

We were all a part of the War Effort. We went along with it, and not only that, we abetted it. Gradually, it became a part of all of us that the truth about anything was automatically secret and that to trifle with it was to interfere with the War Effort. By this I don't mean that the correspondents were liars [but] it is in the things not mentioned that the untruth lies. We felt responsible to what was called the home front. We felt we had to protect the armed services from criticism.

In this respect, women have been employed to enhance the state's use of nationalism and patriotism in its propaganda. In *Woman, Nation and State* (1989) (cited in Sakr, 2004, pp.72-73), authors Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis identified five ways in which women participate in national processes:

First, women are constructed as biological reproducers of members of an ethnic group. Second, they are constructed as reproducers of boundaries of ethnic or national groups. Third, they are ideological reproducers of collectivity and transmitters of culture. Fourth, they signify national difference, and therefore, act as symbols in ideological discourse used in the construction, reproduction and transformation of the nation. Finally, women are constructed as participants in national, economic, political and military struggles.

Certain historical contexts have constructed women's national role, especially in the Middle East and the Arab Gulf States, where they have been 'generally invested with the task of being the moral gauge in society, and bear the burden of being "mothers of the nation".' (Ibid., pp.73-74). In Turkey, for example, women's emancipation was part of the nationalist reform's propaganda that President Mustafa Kemal Atatürk adopted. Turkish scholar Deniz Kandiyoti (1991) argued that women were encouraged to adopt a modern style of dressing, endorse the concept of secularism, and were

allowed to vote in the national elections in 1934 (Khatib, 2004, p.77). The symbolism of women as 'idealized femininity' in patriotic state propaganda has also dominated the world of film and entertainment, as writer Lina Khatib (cited in Khatib, 2004, p.77) explained:

In films about Egypt's former president, Gamal Abdel Nasser, the Egyptian nation is represented as a virtuous female who does not pose a threat to patriarchy. With Egypt imagining itself in terms of honourable, subdued femininity, it is no coincidence that Egyptians informally call their nation *Umm Al Dunya* [mother of the world].

In a more recent historical context, narratives on Emirati women's emancipation and pride were integrated into the state's patriotic propaganda when the UAE Air Force released images of the country's first female pilot, Major Mariam Al Mansouri, onboard an F16 fighter ahead of an air strike to launch a missile attack on ISIS targets in 2014. Nicknamed 'Pride of the UAE', the images released of the first female pilot confirm the state's endorsement of women's emancipation, but it was merely a 'publicity stunt to show off both its military capabilities and its moderate non-conservative [religious] identity, as reported in *The Guardian*' (Allagui and Al Najjar, 2018, p.76).

Yet, in contradiction to this, when women formed feminist movements demanding equality, the patriarchal states of the Middle East and the Arab Gulf specifically viewed them as a threat to religious purity, society, and tradition. Of this, Allagui and Al Najjar (2018, pp.73-74) argued that:

The shift from the representation of idealized women to that of modern women indicates a historical move from private patriarchy, where women are subordinated through their relegation to the home, to public patriarchy, where women are no longer excluded from the public arena, but subordinated within it.

As a result, women are still used to define 'the boundaries of the group identity' (Sakr, 2004, p.77). This was explained by Jan Jindy Pettman (cited in Sakr, 2004, p.77), who argued that:

Women's use in symbolically marking the boundary of the group makes them particularly susceptible to control in strategies to maintain and defend the boundaries. Women's movements and bodies are policed, in terms of their sexuality, fertility, and relations with 'others', especially with the other men. This suggests why [some] men attach political significance to women's 'outward attire and sexual purity', seeing women as their possessions, as those responsible for the transmission of culture and through it political identity, and also as those most vulnerable to abuse, violation or seduction by 'other' men.

This explains why the ongoing debates in the field of Arab feminism were based on two perceptions: reactionary versus deconstructive. As Ftouni (2012, p.163) has explained:

Reactionary accounts are concerned with a critical unmasking of modernity's 'false consciousness' through a reversal of its oppositional logic and hierarchies of power, in an attempt to inscribe an indigenous, culturally-specific, feminist or Islamic alternative.

Meanwhile, 'deconstructive accounts' (Ibid: pp.163-164):

Call for a move that goes beyond binary frameworks and adopts notions such as hybridity, translation and syncretism. By dismantling the rigid boundaries of modernity and tradition, deconstructive approaches stress the heterogeneity of, and the multifaceted encounters between both sides.

Reactionary responses to Arab women's liberation and feminism remain 'trapped in the hegemonic divisions of modernity; the modern against the traditional, epistemic against political, assimilation against difference,' (Ibid., p.164). This is evident in the Islamist and conservative campaigns to Islamize the women's movement and state-backed emancipation projects, an effort that resonates with Nawal El Saadawi's argument that 'Islamic fundamentalist groups are trying to push women *back* to the veil, *back* home, *back* under the domination of their husbands' (cited in Sakr, 2004, p.83).

Recently in Kuwait, Safa Al Hashem, the only female member of the 50-seat National Assembly, made critical remarks on a state campaign sponsored by the Ministry of

Awqaf [endowments] and Islamic Affairs to encourage Kuwaiti women to wear the *hijab*. As Izzak (2018) has shown, through her account on Twitter, Safa ‘described the campaign, made by large roadside billboards, as “strange” and unacceptable in a civil country where the constitution guarantees personal freedom,’ and argued that ‘wearing is a personal decision’ (Izzak, 2018). This enraged Islamist and conservative lawmakers in Kuwait, including fellow members of the Parliament, such as Islamist MP Abdullah Fahhad, who commented that ‘the campaign is in line with the Islamic Sharia and the traditions of the conservative Kuwaiti society,’ and MP Waleed Al Tabtabai, who said that ‘it is difficult to understand how some people are provoked by the picture of a woman with *hijab* and not bothered with the pictures of fashionistas.’ (cited in Izzak, 2018).

Other MPs defended the state-backed campaign, stating that it promoted high values and manners. As such, campaigns such as this project a patriarchal, gendered interpretation of how ‘good mannered’ women should behave (be obedient) and dress. Similar campaigns to Islamize feminism have spread in Islamic nations outside the Middle East and the Arab Gulf States, like Indonesia, where the Islamist political party Hizbut Tahrir demanded the government to abolish Kartini Day; a national day celebrated every year on 21 April as a reminder of Indonesian women’s liberation (Muttaqin, 2018). It was established in 1964 by President Sukarno to celebrate the significant role that educator Raden Adjeng Kartini played to champion Indonesian women’s rights. However, members of Hizbut Tahrir view her as Westernized and secular, and someone who campaigned for rights that the Islamic law already grants for Indonesian women (Ibid.).

The problem which these patriarchal states are falling into concerns the use of Islamic feminism as a lens through which to reimagine feminism which, as Sakr has described (2004, p. 83), utilizes the veil or *hijab* as a:

Tool of nationalism through which social difference is both invented and performed. The demarcation between Islamic fundamentalism and the construction of national identity as modern and oppositional emphasize how definitions of the modern take place in a political field where certain identities are privileged and become dominant, while others are submerged or subordinated, and where secular notions of modern nationhood

subordinate and sometimes seek to destroy alternative bases of solidarity and identity.

Referring to Islamic feminism, Iranian feminist lawyer Shirin Ebadi (cited in Ruether, 2007, p.105) said:

If Islamic feminism means that a Muslim woman can also be a feminist, and feminism and Islam or Muslimhood does not have to be incompatible, I would agree with it. But if it means that feminism in Muslim societies is somehow peculiar and totally different from feminism in other societies so that it has to be always Islamic, I do not agree with such a concept.

Ethnographic studies on women, including this thesis, do not offer an answer to or tackle the predicament in which these women find themselves. Turkish scholar Deniz Kandiyoti (cited in Sakr, 2004, p.84) argued that the:

Activities of women participating in nationalist movements could most easily be legitimized as a natural extension of their womanly nature and as a duty rather than a right. Modernity was invested with different meanings for men, who were relatively free to adopt new styles of conduct, and women, who, in [Afsaneh] Najmabadi's terms [an Iranian gender theorist], had to be "modern yet modest".

Other theorists, such as Laura Mulvey (1989), explained that 'women's sexuality is the condition that makes them visible in a male-dominated world', while Meyda Yegenoglu (1998) claimed that nationalism 'sustains the legacy of Orientalism and its view of Oriental women as objects of men's gaze' (cited in Sakr, 2004, p.84). In addition, Kirsten Schulz indicated that nationalism 'do[es] not erase the view of women as inferior to men. When they are needed they may carry arms and fight, but ultimately they are still seen as "other"' (cited in Sakr, 2004, p.87).

Ftouni (Ftouni, 2012) has pointed out that there is an essential need for an Arab feminist epistemology:

That regards the existential reality of 'being a woman' as a priori to becoming Arab (Muslim, Jew, Christian, secular, heterosexual, homosexual). An epistemology whose objective is to retrieve the agency of Arab women, who are excluded from,

or misrepresented within the narratives of history, culture, politics and knowledge, to theorize new ways of knowing and representing (p.163) ...[and to] acknowledge that our subjectivity, both female and male, stands in a relation of proximity to different configurations and modalities of power (social and cultural) that affect us on the level of experience, albeit differently, and that in order to enunciate a feminist political and epistemological position, we need to re-affirm our lived experiences as women (p.169).

Looking back at the three key themes discussed above in this chapter, it is understandable that the relationship between the Arab Gulf States and women, and women's quest for liberation from the obstacles of patriarchal social norms is complicated and brings to the fore the following question: who are the representatives of patriarchy that women in the Arab Gulf States and in the Emirates, specifically, bargain with, implicitly or explicitly, on a daily basis? Are they family members, or bureaucrats, or representatives of the state apparatus? In the Emirati context, the bargain is like a two-sided coin: implicit and explicit, and it is governed by the neopatriarchal leaders of the state, who aim to change gradually gender discourse, as the following paragraphs will reveal.

Within the family, the patriarchs resist embracing equality as a concept between women and men in fear of threatening family traditions, reputation and honor, or the negative consequences of shame of *ayeb*³² in Arabic. This forms a gender system that is manifestly kinship-ordered, as described by author Valentine Moghadam (cited in Moghadam, 2003, p.15). From an Emirati context, the gender system does not only create asymmetrical power relations between the sexes. It is also situated in and affected by the social processes and social stratification that is embedded in the construction of the Emirati family. For instance, a large group of Emirati women believe in seeking social emancipation through tribal marriages, rejecting the state feminism effort. To them, gaining knowledge through education may earn them social respect, but the main mission for Emirati women is to keep their husbands and family, rather than to be consumed with thoughts of personal ambition and growth, as this alone will provide them with a sense of self-worth. In contrast to western-focused philosophies

³² Arabic for 'shame' (العيب). In the study of superego development, it refers to the cultivation of shame rather than guilt and the enhancement of conformity and fear of others' criticism, rather than individualism and self-criticism (Broucek, 1991, p.8).

of gender empowerment, Emirati 'women's identities are embedded in a particular class, lineage, tribe, or ethnicity, [and] gender is not a determining factor for their actions and aspirations' (Krause, 2008, p.46).

It should be taken into consideration that Emirati women, as much as Arab Gulf women, share the same set of cultural values as their male counterparts, especially those of maintaining the family's social respectability, preserving the principles of modesty and seclusion of women, and widening the net of kin through the choice of marriage as well as engaging in their kin's private socio-political affairs (Pinto, 2012). According to Vania Carvalho Pinto, some women would view the state's proposed plans for them with reluctance. As secure as they felt within the tenets of their traditional place and power within the family, women would likely be reluctant to swap the certainty of their position for an unknown and uncertain situation (Pinto, 2012, p.38).

Another group of Emirati woman, who form the traditional petty bourgeoisie as described by Marxists, or belong to the modern salaried middle class (Moghadam, 2003), have benefited from state-funded education and emancipation campaigns that have enhanced their status. However, they remain reluctant about voicing their concerns publicly and explicitly in fear of appearing disloyal to the governing leadership that works tirelessly towards empowering them and achieving their security, particularly their financial security. As one Emirati woman in a leadership position asserted: '[h]ere it is different from other countries. We like things done smoothly. We don't fight. Say what you want in a good and decent way and you will get it. So, we make up a proposal, and they [the government] study it. The government never says no unless there are disadvantages' (Krause, 2008, p.66).

Regardless of being literate with academic degrees and holding down professions, modern salaried middle-class Emirati women appear to accept the social norms, most importantly social emancipation, as explained previously. They apparently prefer the passive option of preserving the lifestyle and attitudes that their mothers and ancestors passed down to them. As Oscar Wilde famously wrote, '[a]ll women become like their mothers. That is their tragedy. No man does. That is his' (cited in Bullough et al., 1988, p.4). And so, to some Emirati women if not most of them, as Jütting has argued, submitting to the social norms may not only offer women the social integration that is

‘crucial to their own survival and that of their children’(Jütting, 2007, p. 60), but women may also ‘internalize and believe in’ (Ibid.) these norms, particularly if it improves their social status as they grow older.

As a result, accepting patriarchal social norms prevents Emirati women from breaking the glass ceiling completely. In a comprehensive study of the labour market and Emirati women’s presence in the public and private sectors, scholar Nick Forster (2017) surveyed 337 Emirati (male and female) employees during the period February 2008 to June 2011. Forster (2017, p.109) remarked:

[Emirati] women don’t realize their full potential in their careers due to the cultural and attitudinal stereotypes about the “nature” of women, due to women being less willing than men to promote themselves and their interests at work, due to lack of role models and absence of appropriate mentoring for advancement, due to inequities in promotion and performance review processes, due to lack of networking opportunities that render women to be invisible, and due to the “motherhood” assumption that has become a barrier to career success.

Emirati women surveyed by Forster revealed alarming sentiments about the state-backed women’s empowerment projects. In one case (Forster, 2017, p.94), a 25-year-old female marketing manager said:

There is still this view that if you’re a woman and you have strong opinions that somehow you were not well-raised. So, even if you have a valid opinion about something, some men will either ignore you or think you’re some kind of trouble-maker.

The survey also revealed that a third of Emirati men assume that most Emirati women don’t have the leadership potential or abilities to occupy an executive position at work. A 33-year-old male middle manager, who was married with two children, told Forster (2017, p.99):

I do not believe that Islamic principles should be changed and shifted to help women to do this and our traditions and culture do not allow this. I think women should be allowed to work, and can hold any job and can study anything, as long as they do not compromise their families.

In another interview (Forster, 2017, p.99), a 38-year-old male manager at a construction company said:

I do fear the growing power of Emirati women because they may forget our Islamic principles and guidelines, and these women will reflect badly on the image of the UAE as an Islamic country. I believe that it is the responsibility of the man to be the guardian of the woman and to ensure that she does not divert from the right path in any way.

Such notions, which are embedded in Emirati men's and women's minds (just as in the Arab man and woman's mind), convey again the concept of honour or *sharaf* in tribal patriarchal society, which can extend or diminish depending on the individual's attitude (Peristiany, 1965, p.246):

Shyness, for example, is generally appreciated in the woman and is taken as a sign of fine breeding and good manners. It is also a sign of solid character in the man in his dealings with women.

Apparently, in this game of bargaining, it is the governing leaders of the Emirates who, implicitly and explicitly, play a key role in shifting gender discourse and carry the burden of achieving gradual social change that empowers Emirati women. Supported by rapid economic growth, the governing leaders have enforced laws to provide both sexes with equal opportunities for education, work and income, and to undermine discrimination and patriarchal social norms. However, their efforts run up against with another factor, that of Islam, in that UAE laws governing Emirati women's family status, marriage, divorce, inheritance, work, and political practice are religion-based.

As a way forward, the governing leaders in the Emirates have adopted a specific political approach, termed the neopatriarchal state. This involves lobbying the representatives of patriarchal society as well as theologians to promote the fact that Islam encourages the 'complementarity of the sexes' (Moghadam, 2003). As described by feminist Freda Hussein, by so doing, they aim to alter the status of Emirati women. In fact, contemporary feminist theologians have used Quranic verses to challenge those who persistently advocate men's superiority over women such as *Surah Al Baqarah*, verse 2:286, which defines the roles of men and women within a

social system equally, regardless of individual capacity. Verse 2:286 mentioned: 'Allah does not tax a *nafs* [self] beyond its scope. For it [is only] that which it has earned, and against it [is only] that which it has deserved' (cited in Engineer, 1992, p.62). Clearly, in the neopatriarchal state, a term first introduced by Hisham Sharabi, religion is bound to power and state authority with the family, rather than the individual, constituting the universal building block of the community. The neopatriarchal state and the patriarchal family reflect and reinforce each other (cited in Moghadam, 2003, p.11).

The governing leadership refashioned the position of gender by introducing the notion of gender *balance*, rather than equality. This is an attempt to persuade the patriarchal factions and theologians in order to enhance its position as a state in the capitalist world system. In the early 1990s, for instance, the UAE government launched and continues to support a national project known as *Al Asala*³³, to promote cultural revival and heritage preservation, without sacrificing of Islam in the name of progress (Pinto, 2012). While *Al Asala* is based on the recreation of indigenous traditions, as discussed by Pinto, they [the UAE government] have equated the enhancement of Islamic values with the assertion of Emirati culture. This is evident in a renewed interest in Islamic architecture, the reconstruction of mosques, the establishment of 'heritage areas', and the resurgence of handicraft traditions (cited in Pinto, 2012, p.62).

Safeguarding Emirati culture remains at the forefront of the UAE government's agenda, as stated by Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Presidential Affairs, at the opening ceremony of the UAE National Identity Conference in 2008: 'Our adherence to the national and indigenous traditions which are rooted in Islamic and Arab values and traditions does not in any way mean that the UAE is parting with the values and constructive interactions of the modern world' (cited in Pinto, 2012, p.63).

In 2015, the UAE government launched a six-year National Strategy for the Empowerment of Emirati Women (from 2015 to 2021), that has been fully endorsed by the federal governments and private entities in the country, with the aim to 'provide a decent living for [Emirati] women and make them creative in all sustainable and

³³ Arabic for cultural authenticity (الأصالة).

developmental fields' (Majok, 2015). According to the official website of the UAE Government (2017), the strategy's four basic concerns are:

- Maintaining the sustainability of the Emirati women's achievements and continue achieving further gains,
- Maintaining the social fabric and cohesion through integrating the roles between men and women in order to build a strong and cohesive society able to cope with emerging changes,
- Providing a decent and safe social welfare based on high quality foundations for women,
- Developing the spirit of responsibility and strengthening the position of Emirati women in regional and international fore.

Significantly, the government's six-year National Strategy for women has increased their participation in politics, a field that was male dominated even before the country's independence on 2nd December, 1971. In 2015, women broke the glass ceiling and participated in the national elections for the first time. As a result, eight female candidates were elected and became members of the National Federal Council, including Dr. Amal Al Qubaisi, who became the first female Speaker of Assembly to be appointed to the Council (Dajani, 2015).

In 2017, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum, UAE's Vice President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, announced new appointments in a ministerial reshuffle via his official Twitter account. The new appointments included nine women with an age range of more than half a century, making the number of women in the UAE cabinet, as journalist James Langton (2017) pointed out, 'more than women in the White House' and the UAE cabinet 'more gender-equal than Donald Trump's...which has four [women]'. The appointed female ministers are: Maryam Al Muhairi, Minister of State, who is currently responsible for research and planning for the UAE's food security; Sara Al Amiri, Minister of State, age 30, who is currently responsible for advanced sciences; Hessa Buhumaid, Minister of Community Development; Oxford graduate Shamma Al Mazroui, Minister of Youth Affairs, who became the youngest minister in the world, aged 22; Ohood Al Roumi, Minister of State for Happiness; Lubna Al Qassimi, Minister of State for Tolerance; Reem Al Hashimy, Minister of State for International Cooperation; Najla Al Awar, Minister of Community Development;

Jameela Al Muhairi, Minister of State for General Education; Dr. Maitha Al Shamsi, Minister of State; and Noura Al Kaabi, Minister of State for Federal National Council Affairs (Day, 2018).

Gender *balance* has become one of the state's political and socio-economic projects. It is being used widely across every media platform to embrace the global call for equality, without ignoring local customs or national identity, which is strongly influenced by the teachings of Islam. With this in mind, the nation's neo-traditionalist or neopatriarchal leadership has developed its own style in dealing with the issue of gender; that is, by limiting the gender divide. In 2017, the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report indicated that the Emirates ranks as the second highest among Arab countries for the sub-index of wage equality for similar work; first for the sub-index of literacy rates amongst women; and first for the sub-index of sex ratio at birth (UAE Government, 2017).

To further enhance its global competitiveness in terms of gender balance, the national leadership is working on another strategy that aims to make the Emirates one of the world's top 25 countries for gender equality by 2021. In 2018, the first Gender Balance Council³⁴ was launched in the country, chaired by Shaikha Manal Bint Mohammad Bin Rashid Al Maktoum, daughter of the Ruler of Dubai, with the aim of developing legislation and policy frameworks that will narrow the gender gap. Recent government studies reveal that Emirati women represent 46.6% of the workforce and 66% of public sector workers, and 30% of them occupy leadership roles (Day, 2017). This follows a government ruling in 2012, demanding both government and private organizations to employ Emirati women in executive positions, in order to include them in the decision-making process in corporate boardrooms. As a result, Emirati women now run 10% of private sector firms (Day, 2017).

State Islamic feminism and women's empowerment has been endorsed by the patriarchal, monarchical system in the Emirates to legitimise its nation-building project. Women's associations and emancipation campaigns have been incorporated into the socio-political agenda within specific frameworks, which has included 'building a

³⁴ The Gender Balance Council was originally launched in 2015, but was restructured in 2018.

conscious[ness] that women have been given all they need, and establishing that women's natures cannot permit them to function as full citizens' (Krause, 2008, p.65). In this regard, as De Beauvoir wrote, 'women's actions have never been more than symbolic agitation, they have won only what men have been willing to concede' (2011, p.8) and ultimately, it has been [men's] own projects, fears and needs that counted' (2011, p.151).

So, in order to release themselves from the confines of patriarchy, Emirati women must liberate their collective consciousness from the traditional values that determined their status as second-class citizens, if not outrightly inferior. If the liberation of women's (Emirati and Arab alike) collective consciousness is achieved, it will, and only then, place an enormous pressure on lawmakers to create gender-equal laws, and on Islamic jurists and theologians to produce new exegetical works with a revolutionary outlook – separate from secular epistemology, and that mirrors the truth of Islam as a moderate religion, which is evident in Quranic verses that seek equality for man and woman in education, civil and legal rights, and call for the basic human right of free expression.

2.4 The Approach of this Doctoral Research

Media, as an industry and a profession, was not built on a strong foundation when the Emiratis formed a nation 47 years ago. The resources were limited due to the lack of technology, education, and understanding of the overall role of media in creating a diverse and intellectual community, that not only receives news in the form of print or broadcast, but also analyses it to deliver opinions from a variety of perspectives.

For this reason, this thesis will present an in-depth study of media development and the emergence of women's journalism in the Emirates, and the particular socio-cultural challenges that women journalists encounter in the tribal, patriarchal society. In fact, the role of Emirati women in this field was anonymous until the 1970s, when a few of them decided to take a daring step into what was a male-dominated field by writing features for newspapers, entering the newsroom as editors or news hosts, and obtaining scholarships to study media and mass communication in neighbouring Arab countries.

The early wave of female Emirati journalists (1960s to 1980s) faced unceasing criticism for defying the patriarchal system in choosing media as an academic degree and as a profession, rather than degrees and employment in fields labelled 'respectable', such as nursing and education. The next wave of Emirati women journalists (1990s to the millennium), however, were exposed to a different range of challenges by the local media corporations, which distinguish between journalists on the basis of gender, and do not provide women with an appropriate work environment or opportunities for growth. Another challenge is posed by the media regulators (the National Media Council), whose regulations have limited the practise of investigative journalism, which has turned the younger generation of Emirati's and media graduates away from this field.

Beside the challenging conditions of working in the media industry, which includes long working hours, moderately low salaries, and dealing with bad-tempered chief editors (analysed in chapters 4, 5, and 6) there exists an enormous chasm between what Emirati media graduates have studied and what they then encounter once practising media professionally in the Emirates. Most of the academic curricula and modules reflect the best practise in the media from a western perspective, which differs greatly from the reality of media practise in the Arab and Arabian Gulf³⁵ regions.

Because of this, Emirati media graduates avoid joining the media industry, preferring to apply their university-taught journalistic skills in corporate jobs (i.e. working in the press office of a government entity), which provide better opportunities for promotion and financial benefits. Yet again, the social mores of respect and honour that Emirati society values often stand against the practise of investigative journalism, resulting in deterring Emiratis, men and women alike, away from practising this profession and choosing a different industry to start a career (Al Subaihi, 2012).

In spite of this, arguments have been made underlining the absence of Emirati women in the field of print and broadcast media, and in analysing political and economic news stories. Women do, however, have a symbolic media presence, covering social issues

³⁵ On 25 May 1981, the Arabian Peninsula states formed an intergovernmental union and inaugurated the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), known simply as the Gulf States.

such as healthcare, childcare, education, fashion, and lifestyle. In order to examine this field, I have conducted in-depth, one-to-one interviews with 40 Emirati and Arab expat journalists, divided into two groups of 30 Emirati and Arab expat women, and ten Emirati and Arab expat men, to obtain different perspectives on gender identity and dynamics, on socio-cultural constraints, and on stereotypes surrounding this field. In these semi-structured interviews, interviewees have been categorized based on stratification: Emirati and Arab expat journalists from the early generation (1970s – 1990s) and Emirati and Arab expat journalists from the new generation (2000s – onward).

In addition, participant observation has been used with the aim of observing Emirati men and women journalists' routines and activities inside the newsroom, for the duration of four weeks, divided into two weeks each. This took place at Dubai TV and Abu Dhabi Channel One, which belong to two major local media corporations: Dubai Media Incorporated, which is located in the emirate of Dubai, and Abu Dhabi Media Company, which is located in the emirate of Abu Dhabi.

By applying these research methods, this study aims to identify the social and cultural factors that challenge Emirati women journalists and, in particular, the impact of gender identity on their presence in this field, which has often been defined as an issue of human resources or organizational diversity. It also aims to identify the reasons that made journalism become an undesirable job for Emirati women, and presents practical solutions that could be developed to tackle these challenges. These include nationalizing the media corporations to increase the number of Emirati women journalists in employment, which could be achieved by developing specific academic and training schemes, to help them enhance their professional skills, better understand the requirements of the industry, and gain expertise from renowned regional and international media academies and experts in print and broadcast media.

Furthermore, this thesis will identify solutions that could be developed in order to empower Emirati women in the media, arguing for the importance of their engagement in this field, not only to report news to a targeted audience and compete in a male-dominated profession, but also to express openly their concerns, desires, and

ambitions. With this context in mind, four key research questions were used to structure the argument:

1. What are the socio-cultural factors that challenge Emirati women journalists?
2. What constitutes the glass ceiling that Emirati women journalists face in their professional careers?
3. How does the 'gendered' masculine culture of the newsroom challenge the existing journalistic practises and norms in the Emirates?
4. Does gender inequality have an impact on Emirati women journalists' presence in this field?

CHAPTER THREE

Research Methodology

Ethnography

There is a gap in feminist media studies focused on Arab Gulf States, and the issue of gender in the media industry, in particular, is highly under-examined. Gender equality, as a modern western ideal, has no foundation in the culture of the Arab Gulf States, except in Islamic law or *Sharia* that mentions men and women's rights when it comes to education and the ownership of businesses, for example. As discussed in chapter two, Emirati women live in a tribal patriarchal society and only practise limited duties outside the realm of home, with little or no authority in economic and social affairs, even though the state launched several initiatives to champion Emirati women's emancipation in the workplace. Yet, gender came to the fore in the Emirates in 2002 after the publication of the United Nations report that revealed the low proportion of Emirati women involved in political decision-making.³⁶ However, according to the Emirati scholar Suaad Al Oraimi (2011, p.80):

The nature of the tribal-patriarchal system in the UAE prevented the term from emerging as a social force with an economic and political base. The term entered quickly and pervasively into our traditional culture, the Arabic language, and our religious frame of reference, but we have still not developed a fixed mechanism for dealing with it. The concept of gender requires feminist intellectual unity, based on belief in the unity of women's identity, and this does not exist in the UAE.

Gender as a concept is alien to the Arab Gulf and Emirati societies, as is the concept of 'feminism', but they have become part of state modernization and state-sponsored initiatives put into practise to update the traditional role of women and empower them. However, in a study on gender and participation in the Arab Gulf, scholar Wanda Krause (2009) argued that the state-sponsored initiatives, while allowing Arab Gulf

³⁶ UAE ranks 105 out of 128 countries for gender equality, according to the 2007 Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI). In 2017, under the patronage of the Vice President, the UAE Gender Balance Council was launched to enhance the nation's efforts to drive women's participation in the development of the UAE with the ultimate aim of having the UAE become one of the world's top 25 countries for gender equality by 2021 (UAE Cabinet, 2019).

women independence and empowerment to some extent, will not alter the status of gender as a concept in the Arabian Peninsula. Krause argues (cited in Schedneck, 2013, p.115) that this is because:

Women of these nations are typically prohibited from criticizing their government. Within the UAE, the government either runs women's organizations, or sponsors the running of women's organizations. Therefore, involvement in such groups referred to as either government-run organizations or government-organized non-government organizations, leads women toward following the policies of the state.

Nevertheless, studies on the development of the media in the Emirates, from a historical perspective, have been published by a number of historians and academics. These include Iraqi academic Azza Ali Ezzat's book entitled *Al Sihafa Fi Dowal Al Khaleej Al Arabi*³⁷ (1983); Egyptian academic Ahmad Nafadi's *Al Sihafa Fi Dowlat Al Emarat Al Arabiya: Tataworat Tarikhiya*³⁸ (1996); and *Our Media Identity* (2011) by Emirati academic Alia Hassan. A few Western academics have published research studies that offer a limited insight into the media culture and law in the Emirates, such as William Rugh, who wrote a chapter about Emirati media in his book *Arab Mass Media: Newspapers, Radio, and Television in Arab Politics* (2004); and Dr. Adnan Jasim BuMetea, who wrote a thesis entitled *Political Communication in the Arabian Gulf Countries* in 2013. In addition, Dr. Matt J. Duffy wrote a book entitled *Media Law in the United Arab Emirates* (2014), and an article "Cultures of Journalism" in Arabic and English language Newspapers Within the United Arab Emirates' (2013) that aimed to analyse the content of two daily newspapers, the Arabic language *Al Ittihad* and the English language *The National*, which was founded in 2008. Duffy, who taught international media law at the College of Communications and Media Sciences in Zayed University for two years, was eventually deported due to his bold approach to teaching media law and ethics (Duffy, 2012a). In this regard, Duffy's book on Emirati media law has been significant to this doctoral research, as it analysed a very complex issue concerning law and censorship practises in the Emirates.

³⁷ Arabic for 'Journalism in the Arab Gulf States' (الصحافة في دول الخليج العربي).

³⁸ Arabic for 'Journalism in the UAE: a Historical Development' (الصحافة في دولة الإمارات العربية تطورات تاريخية).

In order to gain a deep understanding of media development and culture in the Emirates, I investigated three areas that have been under-examined: self-censorship practises in the newsroom, gender dynamics and the attitudes about gender roles experienced by women journalists, and the link between patriarchy and the empowerment of women journalists in the Emirates. My main methodology includes: (1) using participant observation in the form of diary entries to provide the reader with a vivid picture of everyday journalistic practices that I observed in the newsrooms, and (2) using semi-structured interviews.

Using these two interrelated qualitative approaches, I gathered a significant amount of evidence that has provided a deeper picture of the complexity surrounding gender dynamics and its association with the social constructs of Emirati tribal society. I have also analysed the influence of these social constructs on the media landscape in the Emirates, which is seen as patriotic and loyal to the state. The observations and interviews have elicited how gender and authoritarianism dictate journalistic practises and routines in the newsroom, where *a priori* censorship is commonplace and barriers are created to limit Emirati women journalists' progress in the field.

3.1 Participant Observation

The use of participant observation has been widespread in western media studies, in which ethnographers were involved in fieldwork to observe people's habits and schemes, bearing in mind their cultural differences (Brennen, 2017). According to anthropologist Clifford Geertz (1973), participant observation provides a 'thick description of a culture or group' in which 'researchers consider the relevant social context, which helps them to understand that their observations are representations of a group's cultural reality' (cited in Brennen, 2017, p.161). Or, according to another definition by Jørgensen (1989), it is 'a logic and process of inquiry that is open-ended, flexible, opportunistic, and requires constant redefinition of what is problematic, based on facts gathered in concrete settings of human existence' (cited in Flick, 2013, p.181).

It is broadly accepted that the use of participant observation as an ethnographic approach in media studies began in the 1930s, when three American scholars from the Chicago School of Urban Ethnography developed guiding principles for students to use in their research. Robert Park, W. I. Thomas, and Ernest Burgess found that

ethnographers and journalists possess similar characteristics and attributes in practising their professions (cited in Zelizer, 2004, p.65). Robert's advice to students who were about to begin their ethnographic fieldwork was 'write down what you see and hear, like a newspaper reporter' (Ibid.). The participant observation method was taken up by other researchers to examine media practises, such as Philip Schlesinger, who investigated British news production in 1978; Philip Elliot, who observed a television production team for a British documentary programme for four months in 1972; and Tom Burns who undertook an extensive study of media organizations and bureaucracy by observing journalists at the BBC in 1977 (Ibid., p.65).

For this study, however, my aim was to use participant observation in the form of diary entries, which are fundamental to the ethnographic method, at the aim to understand the socio-cultural factors that shape the lives of Emirati and Arab expat journalists, their thoughts and beliefs about the media environment in the Emirates, and their opinions on the outdated media law, to shed light on newsroom culture and practises in the Emirates. To conduct this research, I took on the role of observer-as-participant. Observer-as-participant, as a method, requires ethnographers to reveal their identity while engaged in fieldwork, but to limit their encounters and engagement with the people being observed (Leavy and Hesse-Biber, 2011). In addition, researchers who take on the role of observer-as-participant document their observations using field notes to record what they have seen, instead of what they have experienced, while observing people's attitudes and activities (Brennen, 2017, p.173).

I intended to undertake participant observation in three popular news centres in the Emirates; Dubai News Centre, which is operated by Dubai Media Incorporated; Sharjah News Centre, which is operated by Sharjah Media Centre; and Abu Dhabi News Centre, which is operated by Abu Dhabi Media Company. However, the process of contacting official representatives at these news centres was difficult and perplexing. It took four months (from October 2016 to January 2017) of long-distance calls and emails from London to convince official representatives of the importance of this research, and to receive a response and approval of access to the newsrooms.

‘*Wasta*³⁹ is your access ticket’, is a phrase I heard from relatives, friends, and academics, long before starting this fieldwork journey. Eventually, I received the first response of approval from Dubai News Centre, followed by Abu Dhabi News Centre. Meanwhile, Sharjah News Centre did not respond at all despite my attempts to follow them up over the phone and by email.

Because official representatives at Dubai and Abu Dhabi news centres were not warm to participant observation, I was requested to submit official letters (signed by academics and the university), to draft a fact sheet about the research (written in Arabic), and to attend brief meetings to further discuss the plan and timeline of the fieldwork with official representatives including the director generals for both news centres. During these brief meetings, I noticed that there was a level of hesitation about observing the newsroom, and how it might be documented in this study, because the concept of gender equality, for instance, has no basis in Emirati society, while the concepts of press freedom and censorship are considered too sensitive to be discussed openly.

At the end of these meetings, I was advised by the director generals for both centres to spend three hours inside the newsroom starting at 6pm, when most of the editorial staff would be actively present, and witness for myself the work routine and the production of news before the daily broadcast of the one-hour local evening news, which was aired at 8pm from The Gallery⁴⁰. I witnessed that both news centres broadcast the news at the same hour on national television, from 8pm to 9pm. Despite the fact that the story segmentation and local news production are hierarchical, I witnessed that Dubai TV’s *Akhbar Al Emarat*⁴¹ news broadcast highlights current news that is related to the federal emirate of Dubai, once the presidential court news is covered. Meanwhile, the Abu Dhabi TV’s *Oloum Al Dar*⁴² broadcast highlights current

³⁹ A term commonly used by locals to refer to an improper scheme or an act of expediency to gain an advantage or break policy.

⁴⁰ a large glass panelled office full of screens and technical equipment designed inside both newsrooms to edit and direct the live news broadcast, staffed by a team of editors, technicians, producers, and directors.

⁴¹ Arabic for ‘Emirates news’ (أخبار الإمارات).

⁴² A common term used by locals to refer to domestic news (علوم الدار).

news related to the capital city of Abu Dhabi, once the presidential court news is covered (the observations and analysis are discussed at length in chapter five).

In addition, the director generals for both news centres advised against having me attend the editorial meetings to avoid documenting confidential communication. When I stated that I needed to observe the pre-rundown meeting at the beginning of the week and the retrospective meeting at the end of the week to analyse the editorial team's viewpoints over news planning and production, my request was denied. The director generals explained that it was unnecessary for me to observe these meetings because news planning is often changable during the editing process, especially if editors receive an urgent news story. Moreover, they stated that the editorial teams at both newsrooms use the WhatsApp platform to assign tasks, answer inquiries, and inform colleagues about medical absences, thus limiting the number of weekly meetings to one that is held on Mondays, as was the case in Dubai newsroom.

This hesitation was even more evident when I undertook observing the day-to-day routine of Emirati and Arab expat journalists from a desk that was allocated for me inside both newsrooms, in three hour slots (from 6pm to 9pm), for 14 days⁴³, excluding Fridays and Saturdays). For instance, in the first few days of observation inside Dubai newsroom, Emirati journalists and senior editors would speak in low tones to avoid their conversations being documented, and would often tell me: 'this conversation is not to be written down in your field notes, please'. However, some Emirati journalists and editors, especially those who held academic degrees in mass communication, would often ask about ethnography, which was new to them, as they were only acquainted with quantitative research methodologies, such as surveys and questionnaires. This gave me an opportunity to engage in conversations with Emirati journalists, in particular, who were confident to talk openly about newsroom practises and certain taboo subjects that cannot be broadcasted in the Emirati media. In one conversation, for instance, a male editor from the Abu Dhabi newsroom, who preferred to be anonymous in this study, told me: "there's no freedom of the press, as defined

⁴³ This time frame was planned for and agreed between the doctoral research student and the director of study.

in the West. We practise self-censorship” (the observations and analysis are discussed at length in chapter five).

Besides this, I aimed to observe the activities and tasks assigned to each team member, to analyse the conversations inside the two newsrooms, and to study body language for any signs of gendered attitudes towards women journalists in particular. Through observations, there was also an opportunity to examine the activities and tasks assigned to team members broadcasting local news for Dubai One⁴⁴, an English language subchannel created by Dubai Media Incorporated in 2004. *Dubai One News*, which broadcasts story segmentations regarding local, sports and economic news, was hosted by Emirati and foreign expat news anchors. I briefly observed them as they use the same studio facilities offered for *Akhbar Al Emarat* editorial team, but they rarely network with them. Observing the live broadcast of *Dubai One News* gave me an insight to the English language news production in the Emirates, which follows the same hierarchical format. It is to be noted that these observations were documented using field notes only (the observations and analysis are discussed at length in chapter five).

3.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

Referred to as ‘personal-testimony research and life-story research’ (Abrams, 2016, p.2), a semi-structured interview is an approach in which a researcher conducts recorded interviews to collect evidence and statements on people’s stories. In western media studies, specifically, the use of semi-structured interviews as a qualitative method began in the 1960s, to chronicle the histories of major newspapers and corporations, as well as the biographies of prominent media founders and owners (Brennen, 2017, p.28).

For the purposes of this research, I conducted one-to-one interviews with 40 Emirati and Arab expat journalists, aiming to record their testimonies and experiences in practising journalism, and to study their perspectives on the newsroom culture and on the media environment in the Emirates. In fact, as pointed out by BuMetea (2013,

⁴⁴ Dubai One was created as a substitute for Dubai’s Channel 33, which was first launched in 1994 for the English-speaking audience. It broadcasts popular sitcoms, series, and movies, as well as local news programmes.

p.14) scholar A. Rashed, who interviewed the editors of three local Arabic dailies, has conducted the only study to examine the political system and the press in the Emirates using semi-structured interviews, as part of a Master's thesis entitled *The Relationship between the Press and Political Authority in the UAE: Applied Study on Al Etihad, Al Bayan, and Al Etihad Newspapers From 1972 to 1990* (1995).

For this study, the chosen journalists represented local print and broadcast media corporations, which are as follows:

1. Abu Dhabi Television Channel One
2. Emirates News Agency (WAM)
3. *Al Ittihad* newspaper (an Abu Dhabi daily)
4. *Al Bayan* newspaper (a Dubai daily)
5. *Al Khaleej* newspaper (a Sharjah daily)
6. *Al Roeya* newspaper (an Abu Dhabi daily)
7. *Zahrat Al Khaleej* women's weekly magazine (Abu Dhabi)
8. *Al Azminah Al Arabiya* weekly magazine (Sharjah)
9. *Awraq* weekly magazine (Sharjah)

The interviewees came from different schools of thoughts, influenced by their culture, education, and their previous experiences in journalism in other Arab countries. For the ten male journalists, for instance, there were six Arab expats who came from Egypt and Palestine (four Egyptians and two Palestinians), each with more than 20 years of experience, and who expressed concerns about the oppressive media environment in the Emirates. The remaining three male journalists, however, were Emiratis who were born between the 1950s and 1970s, and have had a relatively positive experience in journalism. As for the 30 women journalists, they too were influenced by their culture, education, and their previous experiences in journalism, in careers that spanned from two to 30 years. Of these women, 22 were Emiratis, while the remaining nine came from Jordan, Morocco, Syria, Egypt, and Iraq. Their testimonies revealed the hardships they experienced working in a male-controlled, male-dominated industry, let alone working in countries where the media systems were controlled by dictatorships like Iraq. It also revealed their honest accounts of inequality and harassment in the newsroom, as well as their aspiration for a better media environment that gives them empowerment through expression.

On this point, the one-to-one interviews with 40 Emirati and Arab expat journalists started in 15th February 2017 and ended in 1st May 2017. I managed to contact (by phone and email) personal assistants and meet with editors-in-chief at the targeted local media corporations through acquaintances with whom I worked closely during my nine year tenure as a PR professional, and mutual university classmate, who have become successful media professionals. After explaining the importance of this empirical study in documenting the history of media development in the Emirates, editors-in-chief welcomed my request to conduct the one-to-one interviews and allowed me to speak freely with the journalists in order to schedule mutually convenient interview dates. All 40 interviews took place in private meeting rooms inside the newsrooms, where each journalist signed a consent form approving the publication of their testimonies.

It is to be noted that two large local media corporations that produce top English speaking dailies did not allow me access to interview their journalists. When I visited the head offices of both *The National*⁴⁵ and *Gulf News*⁴⁶, I was escorted to the HR Department, where official representatives were keen on viewing the list of questions rather than learning about the empirical study. At *The National's* head office, for instance, the HR representative (an Egyptian) contacted the editor-in-chief. Judging from her facial expression and the low tone of conversation between the two, I understood immediately that accessibility to the newsroom was impossible. Requesting an explanation, the HR representative told me that *The National's* journalists are not allowed to meet with researchers in adherence with the newspaper's HR policy. At *Gulf News*, however, the scenario was different. The HR representatives (two Indians), who were against the idea of me meeting the newspaper's Emirati editor-in-chief, reflected their sense of intimidation regarding their journalists answering questions that could potentially voice opinions on the topics of self-censorship and the oppressive media law in the Emirates. I understood their concern, or perhaps the fear of losing their jobs if they were to permit journalists to participate, and thus I decided not to be insistent during the meeting with them.

⁴⁵ Founded in 2008 by Abu Dhabi Media Company. In 2017, the UK's International Media Investments privatized it.

⁴⁶ Founded in 1978 by Dubai's Al Nisr Publishing LLC.

I used standardized, semi-structured interviews, with all interviewees. According to Fielding and Thomas (2003), standardized, semi-structured interviews ‘involve asking the same set of questions in the same words and sequence in all the interviews’ (cited in BuMetea, 2013, p.113). In this context, I prepared a list of interview questions⁴⁷ for the chosen journalists, which were translated into Arabic, to document their personal stories, and to determine the socio-cultural factors that resulted in the emergence of gender inequality in Emirati media. Some questions alarmed the chosen journalists as it exposed them to notions of gender politics that are often unvoiced inside the newsroom, particularly among women journalists regardless of their age and nationality. For example, when I asked the chosen journalists if they thought that journalism as a profession is gendered, I received different opinions that clearly made me realize that gender as a concept is misunderstood. Male journalists, specifically, thought that the word ‘gendered’ is associated with gender equality that only concerns women and feminists. Emirati male journalists, specifically, overestimated the role of Emirati women in terms of their being represented in leadership positions in every vital sector including politics as a result of the governing leadership’s empowerment campaigns. These participants were neglecting the reality that gender inequality exists in the Emirates as much as in other parts of the Arab world, whence a number of journalists came from, due to patriarchy and complex societal norms that impose gender restrictions on men and women. Some women journalists misunderstood the same question too, thinking that the word ‘gendered’ only referred to the predominance of men. Those who were aware of gender related issues, however, gave elaborate answers to narrate their experience of gender stereotypes and gender discrimination in the workplace as much as at home, where they grew up learning that gender restriction is a customary social norm (these testimonies are discussed at length in chapters five and six).

Furthermore, the interview questions covered other topics crucial to this study including the practice of self-censorship and the newsroom culture in the Emirates. For example, the chosen journalists were asked if they faced some level of resistance in terms of content, or whether the stories or features that they drafted were banned from publication. When asked if they felt threatened by the media law or the media

⁴⁷ For the full list of questions, please see the appendices section.

authorities, some journalists refused to comment on their experiences with the censors who represent the media authorities in the Emirates. Some others openly revealed that the practise of self-censorship saved them from court battles and legal punishment, which had resulted in the closing down of a few local dailies (these testimonies are discussed at length in chapter five).

Because the nature of the interview questions sparked astonishing revelations and eye-opening narratives about the chosen journalists' experiences, some of them preferred to be anonymous, and accordingly signed the consent that I have created using pseudonyms or fictitious names to hide their true identities. In fact, eight female journalists used pseudonyms, while one male journalist did so. The reason for this, as the chosen journalists told me, was the fear of their revelations and accusations becoming known by colleagues and executives, particularly by those who perpetrated mistreatment against them by practising gender politics inside the newsroom. In addition, anonymity has provided these nine journalists with a sense of assurance and confidence to criticize the practise of censorship and the punishing terms of the media law. The other journalists, however, who wished to have their true identities revealed, were not intimidated by the interview questions, which they answered critically and with an open mind, motivated by the belief that the on-going battle of sexes inside the newsroom must be investigated and resolved by implementing policies to secure journalists' rights to free speech and ending gender inequality (these testimonies are discussed at length in chapter five).

The one-to-one interviews, which were voice recorded with the interviewees' consent⁴⁸, were conducted with journalists who were categorized based on the following:

1. Gender: 30 female journalists and 10 male journalists.
2. Stratification: journalists from the early generation (1970s – 1990s), between the ages of 30 to 60, and journalists from the new generation (2000s – onward), in their twenties.

⁴⁸ All interviews were conducted in the Arabic language, except for one. The quotes included in chapters five, six and seven were translated into English by the author. Full transcripts are available upon request.

The reason behind selecting interviewees based on gender and stratification was to determine how gender dynamics and gender inequality in the newsroom had emerged between two generations in the Emirates; the pattern that it had followed; and the different experiences of inequality by the two generations. In a 1968 study on intergenerational transmission, sociologist Otis Duncan argued that 'social stratification refers to the persistence of positions in a hierarchy of inequality, either over the lifetime of a birth cohort of individuals, or more particularly, between generations' (cited in Bottero, 2005, p.4).

It must be noted that during the collection of the semi-structured interviews, a number of the chosen journalists were hesitant about having their age listed⁴⁹, especially women, who have confided in me that they were close to the legal retirement age. Some others shyly preferred to keep this detail discreet, a request that I respected out of decorum. Among the chosen male journalists, however, only one interviewee avoided listing his age, citing the reason that he has often been viewed as too young to hold the position of editor-in-chief for a daily newspaper that is funded by the government.

With regards to stratification, this notion has been used in contemporary western media studies to investigate gender inequality and the misrepresentation of women in the field of journalism. Scholars Ramona Rush, Carol Oukrop, and Sandra Ernst, for instance, conducted a study in gender inequality in the field of journalism and mass communication education in 1972. They found that women's membership in the Association for Education in Journalism (AEJ) consisted of only 7% to 8% (cited in Rush, Oukrop and Creedon, 2004, p.130). Another study for the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (AEJMC), which was conducted by Gerald Kosicki, K. Viswanath, and Pamela Creedon in 1992, found that women constituted only 28% of all mass communication faculties in America (Ibid.)

The observations that took place inside the two Emirati newsrooms and the collection of semi-structured interviews, have widened the themes of this doctoral research, particularly in the area of news production. This has been studied extensively in the

⁴⁹ For the full list of ages, please see the appendices section.

west, where ethnographers have implied that all journalists, regardless of their cultural differences, share similar characteristics. In her research on television newsrooms, for instance, Harrison (2000) (cited in Bird, 2010, p.21) found that journalists across news organizations have certain similarities in terms of practises and normative standards. Other researchers such as Soloski (1999) (cited in Bird, 2010, p.21) suggested that journalists are influenced by the ideal of objectivity and the excitement of submitting a news story in a specific timeline (Ibid.). Meanwhile, ethnographers such as Ericson, Baranek, and Chan (1987) found that news production is more pressured and involves negotiating multiple demands such as financial budgets, deadlines, promotions, and ambitions (cited in Miall, Pawluch and Shaffir, 2005, p.288); or, as Strauss (1978) observed, news production is 'a negotiated order' (cited in Miall, Pawluch and Shaffir, 2005, p.288).

Furthermore, after observing newsroom practises in America for ten years, Herbert J. Gans (1979) identified four main factors in news production. As discussed by Batabyal, the first of these 'gives primacy to the professional judgment of the journalist' in the selection of news stories (2012, p.9). The second 'sees news as an outcome of complex organizational practises', which means that news production relies on the organization's demands to sustain and support itself (Ibid.). In the third factor 'news [is] a mirror of reality', while the fourth considers the 'influences on news determinants coming from beyond the newsroom', such as technology, political ideology, and national cultural values (Ibid.).

CHAPTER FOUR

The Media Landscape and State Control in The Emirates

Despite the rapid development in its infrastructure from the 1970s onwards, the media environment in the Emirates has been seen as oppressive and unrepresentative due to the government's control over publications, leading the majority of journalists, men and women, locals and expats, to practise self-censorship and to feel intimidated by the state's legislation and regulations that governs and surveil every media platform in The Emirates.

Certain articles in the Publication and Publishing Law, which was officially released by the Ministry of Information and Culture in November 1980, and not amended ever since, received waves of criticism by journalists in the Emirates and media observers internationally. For instance, articles 70 and 71 of the law state: '[n]o criticism shall be made against the head of state or rulers of the Emirates', and '[a]ny work is absolutely prohibited from being published if it involves instigation against Islam or the system of ruling, or if it causes harm to the interest of the state or the values of society (the UAE Federal Government, 1980, p.19). When it comes to the political affairs of the nation, as stated in articles 76 and 77 (1980, p.19):

No article blemishing the president of an Arab, Islamic or any other friendly state will be published. It is also prohibited to publish any material that causes agitation to relations between the UAE and other Arab, Islamic and friendly countries. No article defaming Arabs and their civilization and heritage shall be published.

Consequently, journalists consider self-censorship as a normal practise, and the leading media outlets frequently publish government statements without criticism or comment. In a column dated 2 January 1980 for *Al Azminah Al Arabiya* weekly magazine (cited in Ezzat, 1983, pp.131-132), Emirati journalist Mohammed Obaid Ghubash wrote:

The press here is usually obliged to adhere to unwritten laws, and so it does not publish words of criticism or comments, but of

glorification and gratitude for the sake of specific political considerations towards neighbouring countries, and it avoids publishing words of criticism that aim towards guiding and improving [services] against a government body or an authority in fear of jeopardizing one's career. There is always the issue of "sensitivity", or of topics being far too sensitive to be discussed, or written, and even published. So, eventually, journalists cannot practise their profession nor express their point of view freely, and end up writing reports using totally different languages and approaches aimed directly at executives and officials; and that is praise and glorification.

The relation between the state and media in the Emirates is complicated. The state exercises political and financial power, in particular, through directing top media corporations' officials, in both Arabic and English language press, on what type of content to publish and on how to produce news. The Emirati scholar A. Rashed in her thesis, *The Relationship Between The Press and Political Authority in the UAE* reports that the government on the one hand obliges newspapers to publish the ministries' news with regard to their achievements, while on the other hand, prevents them from publishing any negative news dealing with national and regional security, such as border disputes and foreign military presence (cited in BuMetea, 2013, p.25).

The rapid growth of technology, the introduction of satellite television, and the emergence of globalization in the 1990s have made the state conscious of the importance of privatizing the media in the Emirates in an attempt to enhance its performance, lower corporate bureaucracy, and achieve independence in reporting. In order to achieve these goals, free-media zones were launched in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, followed by the establishment of a media zone authority in 2007 with the aim being to facilitate the growth of a diverse media industry in the Emirates. Meanwhile, state ministers have spoken out to champion media privatization in the Emirates. For instance, the former Minister of Information, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, in 2001 stated that in the age of satellite television, governments can no longer control the dissemination of information to their citizens. He contended that the public would no longer accept media that are seen as being government-controlled and which seek to provide them with a limited and partial view of events (cited in Rugh, 2004, p.65). Still, achieving a free media environment remains very challenging in the Emirates due to its political nature as an authoritarian regime. Privatizing the media industry rests

on the influence of government financing as well as the strategic and political interests of executives and owners of the media corporations such as in the case of Dubai Media City (DMC), where the director general once stated that journalists were [are] expected to exercise their freedom not to politicize society, but to focus on issues such as education, health, and [the] economy (Mellor, 2011, p.151). As a result, freedom of expression is limited for the media context is dominated with political news that serves the interests of the state, and the production of news is systematically preoccupied with newsroom routines and practises, including self-censorship, which will be discussed at length in the next chapters.

4.1 The History of Government Control Over the Media

In order to have a profound understanding of the media environment from both historical and legal perspectives, the following section will assess the evolution of the three stages of the press in the UAE. The first stage, the press and rulers, reflects the direct involvement of Emirati rulers in developing the local press in the early years of nation-building, through the allocation of generous printing budgets and the appointment of Emirati journalists to interpret their outlook on internal and external political matters in writing. Examples include the ruler of Sharjah, Sheikh Sultan bin Mohammed Al Qassimi, who approved the publication of *Al Khaleej* newspaper in 1970, and appointed Emirati journalist Taryam Omran to mirror his strong political beliefs on Arab Nationalism, the Palestinian Cause, and the ideology of Nasserism (Ezzat, 1983).

In the second stage, the press and colonization, the editorial content was mostly developed to criticize the British colonization of the Trucial States and neighbouring Arab Gulf States, shedding light on issues like the political cupidity of the Iranians, who were clinging to the historical fact that the peninsula is Persian not Arabian, and that of the Americans in the area after the discovery of oil. Before the political independence of the Emirates in 1971, newspaper articles alerted the local community about suspicions that foreign powers like Britain and Iran broadcasted through their wireless radio stations in London, Tehran, and Ahvaz, to distort the image and values of the Arab revolts towards Arab Nationalism and freedom. A number of regional Arabic newspapers were banned from distribution, such as Egypt's *Al Joumhouria*,

after the publication of an article by columnist Mamdouh Riza on 14 January 1965, which questioned Iran's activity in the Arab Gulf States (Ezzat, 1983).

The third and final stage, the press and oil, reflects the commercial association between the two. The discovery of oil, followed by the immense growth of public wealth, created the opportunity for quick profit for newly established local entities and foreign businesses, such as oil companies and car galleries. This was achieved through advertising in local newspapers, which had developed high quality in-house printing facilities. Soon afterwards, the increased demand on newspaper advertising space resulted in the emergence of dedicated supplements that specialized in covering business and economic news, in most of the local newspapers, boosting corporate profit and the regional distribution of Emirati newspapers throughout the 1980s and 1990s (Ezzat, 1983).

With sweeping changes in the political environment across the Arab region taking place since the millennium, Emirati journalists demanded authorities to amend the outdated law, which was over 40 years old. The request for an amendment was rejected, but on 25 September 2007, a sudden shift occurred and a call for a new media law was made by the Vice President and Prime Minister and Ruler of Dubai, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum. This call (against imprisoning journalists) occurred only after two journalists working for Dubai's *Khaleej Times* English daily newspaper were imprisoned for two months for libelling an Iranian woman. However, the Vice President's call has not yet been made official as an Emiri (royal) decree, and thus, the law has not been amended, leaving Emirati and expat journalists unprotected (Puddington et al., 2008, p.340).

After the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood to political power in Egypt in the aftermath of the Arab Spring in 2010, the Reporters Without Borders organization reported that a number of journalists were arrested and imprisoned, while others had their passports confiscated and visas terminated by the Emirati authorities. The authorities argued that the journalists were imprisoned for supporting the Muslim Brotherhood, which is categorized as a terrorist organization in the Emirates. But to media observers, the Emirati authorities had ostracized journalists whose opinions were not in line with the

authoritarian regime's political agenda, and therefore, used the Anti-Terrorism Act of 2004 to limit the journalists' freedom of expression (Gasiorowski, 2017, p.367).

As a result, Emirati and expat journalists alike feel restricted in practising journalism in the Emirates, which was rated as 'not free' by the US democracy advocacy group Freedom House in 2011, and ranked 112th out of 176 countries by the French press freedom organization Reporters Without Borders. A number of Emirati journalists and intellectuals were bold enough to discuss – in writing – the issue of media restrictions and the lack of press freedom in local newspapers. An example is the Emirati professor at the UAE University and columnist Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla, who wrote a column in Dubai's English daily *Gulf News*, commenting that the 2011 press freedom ranking is 'embarrassing' and should be 'rectified through a concerted national effort' (Duffy, 2014, p.29). His colleague, Dr. Anwar Gargash, who taught political science at the UAE University told a media conference in 2005 that 'the Arab media is still very much state-owned and state-controlled. The way forward is to break the chains of the media' (Duffy, 2014, p.29). His outspoken remarks were made shortly before his appointment as the country's Minister of State for Foreign Affairs (in 2008), and were never made again. In addition, in response to the continuous criticism of the media environment in the Emirates, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of The National Media Council⁵⁰, stated in 2013 that the 'Freedom House ranking that placed the Emirates 158th out of 196 countries in terms of press freedom was not an accurate reflection of reality. This ranking is based on the law, not practice' (Bardsley, 2015).

In this respect, due to the current oppressive media environment, journalists do not play a role as watchdogs, because it is not recognized in the Emirates, let alone in the Arabian Gulf States and the Arab region. In another column published in Dubai's English daily *Gulf News* in 2010 (cited in Duffy, 2014, p.53), Dr. Abdulkhaleq Abdulla wrote:

Journalists are no longer doing their duty, meaning that the press is no longer monitoring the performance of the government. The

⁵⁰ The Ministry of Information and Culture was terminated in 2006 and The National Media Council (NMC) was established soon afterwards.

government used its regulatory powers to cower the press and has done everything possible to gently court the media, keep it happy but under its tight benevolent watch. The government has made sure that the media does not develop an independent mind of its own.

With the absence of investigative journalism, the escalation of censorship, and the increase in reference to the red lines by Emirati and expat journalists working in the country, who fear deportation or imprisonment, media observers believe that the country has created a media system that practises '*a priori* censorship' (Duffy, 2014, p.31) over all types of information. This is reflected in journalists' day-to-day practices for collecting information and producing news. For instance, journalists would often put a news story on hold and wait for it to be approved and released in advance by the official news agency of the Emirates, which is known by its Arabic abbreviation, WAM. If a news story was labelled as sensitive and was eventually disregarded by editors in WAM, journalists would follow their lead and avoid releasing it in their newspaper. These practises reflect the *a priori* censorship system that the Emirati authorities have imposed on journalists and media corporations, leaving no need for a media police to monitor them in-house, day and night (Ibid.).

The findings (discussed at length in chapters five, six and seven) on news production in the Emirates reflect the national cultural values that determine news, as has been examined by Johan Galtung and Mari Holmboe Ruge in their study *The Structure of Foreign News* (1965). Galtung and Ruge argued that there are cultural elements to the way that events are transmitted as news, stating that 'the more the event concerns elite people, the more probable that it will become a news item' (cited in Clausen, 2003, p.46). Reflecting on the news culture in the Emirates, it is evident that elite people make national news. The elite here are the ruling families and members of the cabinet elected by the Supreme Court, which consists of the rulers of the seven federal emirates. They set the local media agenda, provide the local media outlets with news in the form of events or statements, and play the role of sources to the local media outlets, because, simply, they hold political and economic powers. In news production studies, according to Gans (1979), 'the economically and politically powerful sources have more access to the media, and therefore, more opportunity to insert messages into media channels' (cited in Clausen, 2003, p.49).

As a consequence, the rise of political power in the Emirates after the federal union in 1971 has impacted the news production and public opinion, especially the post-oil generation, as sources of political power benefit from the advanced media infrastructure to instill messages of patriotism or nationalism in Emirati men and women citizens as well as journalists, affecting the practice of journalism in the Emirates in general. Nationalism has been defined 'as an ideological and social movement, which imposes opportunities and burdens upon its citizens, particularly women' (Schedneck, 2013, p.53). In this sense, there is a profound nationalist bias in the news production of the Emirates, and Emirati men and women journalists frequently put patriotism before professionalism. This patriotic news production reflects the ideological and cultural realities of Emiratis, who are labelled as a minority in their own homeland due to the strong presence of Arab and foreign expats and the impact of globalization on their national identity (Baldwin, 2008).

With all these historical changes in the press, why were Emirati women specifically off the pace in contributing to the press? I argue that Emirati women were very late in endorsing the concepts of intellectual liberty and equality that Arab feminists like Hind Nawfal, Huda Shaarawi, Faiza Nabrawi, Doria Shafiq, and Ghanima Al Marzouk championed in the early to mid-twentieth century, because of the lack of educational opportunities, and the persistence of patriarchy in the Emirates.

Before the discovery of oil, Emirati women participated in collective duties because difficult economic conditions forced Emirati men to travel for months, for pearl diving expeditions or trading. However, taking up these roles did not mean that Emirati women became decision makers, but rather social negotiators, who practised these duties as a courtesy only due to the financial demands at that time, not based on the concept of equality or women's rights. After the discovery of oil, Emirati women's participation in collective duties decreased and thus, Emirati women became financially dependent on men, and aimed to attain social emancipation only. This dramatic shift in the economy reaffirmed the tribal patriarchal system (Al Oraiimi, 2011). Moreover, censored media cultures have a disturbing effect on Emirati women's contribution to the arts and literature, the practice and production of which remains rare for Emirati women today, as it was decades ago before the country's independence in 1971. This is due to the solitary nature and sheer difficulty of writing,

reinforced by the limited access to school education for Emirati women in the pre-independence and early independence periods. Nevertheless, the local cultural scene had witnessed the emergence of two waves of creative Emirati women writers from the 1960s to the late 1980s, which is viewed as the golden age of literature and the journalism movement in the Emirates. This included popular names like poet Ousha bint Khalifa Al Suwaidi, who published a series of Nabatean⁵¹ poetry in the early 1970s under the nickname of *Bint Al Arab*⁵², and novelists Amaal Khalid Al Qassimi and Nama Al Qassimi (Salih, 1983).

Furthermore, the launch of the Emirates Writers Union (EWU) in 1984, which was founded by 30 active members (Gulf News, 2012), presented potential opportunities towards the freedom of the press and expression for the second wave of creative Emirati writers, men and women alike. However, literary production and investigative journalism remained rare because of censorship and the fear of punishment under the media law. In 1973, for instance, a group of young Emirati journalists led by Dr. Mohamed Obaid Ghubash launched *Al Majmaa*⁵³, a weekly magazine that published numerous political and cultural news features using a sharp, critical tone, that surprised the local community. This resulted in its closure two years later by the Ministry of Culture and Information, which was replaced by The National Media Council (NMC) in 2006.

About his experience as an editor for the magazine, Dr. Mohamed Obaid Ghubash said: 'It was one of the first local magazines that criticized the government instead of producing a fluff propaganda about it to the readers. We were very enthusiastic, and my generation was influenced by the concept of freedom. We loathed the ideologies of Nationalism and Nasserism, especially after the Six Day War defeat against Israel, and embraced the ideology of Islamism that the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt introduced as an optimistic alternative political movement to resolve the embarrassing Arab political failure' (Al Ansari, 2005).

⁵¹ Poetry written in Emirati dialect (الشعر النبطي).

⁵² Arabic for 'daughter of Arabs' (بنت العرب).

⁵³ Arabic for 'assembly' (المجمع).

Al Azminah Al Arabiya was another politically focused weekly magazine that endorsed the writing talents of Emirati women journalists, including Khairiyah Rabei from the northern emirate of Ajman, who wrote special features about Palestinian women rights, as well as Dr. Rafia Obaid Ghubash, Dr. Hessa Abdullah Lootah, and Hala Humaid, who wrote cultural features that focused on art and literature. However, the magazine was banned from publishing on 18 October 1981, after releasing a critical cover story celebrating the assassination of Egypt's President Muhammad Anwar El Sadat, who was portrayed generally in the Arab press as a betrayer of Arab unity, after agreeing to sign a peace treaty with Israel at Camp David in 1979. The magazine's cover story was also released with a bold, sarcastic headline on its cover page that read: '[t]he Arabs' Betrayer Has Fallen' (Salih, 1983, p.357).

Unable to retain free expression or a free press, Emirati men and women writers produce little creative work, with only 108 active Emirati members in the Emirates Writers Union (Gulf News, 2012). They are far from able to practise investigative journalism in a field that is shadowed by tribal political loyalty, censorship, and under-representation, which is made even more apparent by the fact that the UAE Journalists Association had 58 active members at its (late) inauguration in January 2000 (UAE Journalists Association, 2019), and that this number had only increased to 372 by 2018 (Abdelhamid, 2018).

In an article published by *Banipal* (2011), a London-based magazine dedicated to Arab literature, Emirati short story author Mariam Al Saedi described Emirati women's contribution to the current literary movement as follows: '[a] conservative society closed in on itself, [and] immersed in taboos will never produce a single real novel. The novel is not born in a suffocated, restricted society; and if it is ever written in such a society, it will be one of those novels, which young women write desiring only to challenge society superficially, and these are therefore novels without any literary value. Such novels are good for releasing pent-up feelings, nothing more' (cited in Qualey, 2011).

4.2 The Code of Ethics and Journalism Practises

News production in the Emirates is viewed as systematic, whether broadcast in Arabic or English, the format of producing and publishing news remains standardized and in

line with the authoritarian state's political and socio-cultural agendas. Content of the media is monitored and controlled through a series of government channels such as the National Media Council that sets press regulations, the Emirates News Agency (WAM), the country's official news agency, and the Security Media Department, which is operated by the Ministry of Interior. Previous attempts to publish independent and investigative news has impacted negatively on the publication of dailies, such as in the case of Dubai's English free daily tabloid *7 Days*, which was launched in 2004 by UK's General Trust and the Daily Mail. When the daily tabloid released news features concerning workers' abuse and prostitution in Dubai, it was suspended temporarily, and was required to follow in-house managerial changes, in which managing editors started to practise self-censorship in order to avoid provoking the authorities any further (cited in The Report Dubai, 2007). After 14 years of operations, on 22 December 2016, its Managing Editor, Claire Sharrock, announced *7 Days* closure by writing that the final edition marked 'the end of an era... a huge blow to media in the UAE... a Dubai institution gone... not our words, but yours' (Al Serkal, 2016).

This case foregrounds the type of journalism practises followed inside the newsroom by Emirati and expat journalists alike, despite their experiences and knowledge of media ethics, press freedom, and freedom of expression. As debated by McQuail (2005), journalists in the Emirates apply certain 'judgment guidelines' or 'news values' (cited in BuMetea, 2013, p.34), in which news is classified as either newsworthy or not. The impact of this is to make processes of news production biased as it is orchestrated by political power, and the practise of journalism is limited due to pressures imposed on journalists by the newspapers' corporate policies as well as by the news sources that they rely on and who are often reflecting the power of the authoritarian regime rather than contributing substantial news stories.

This media reality has become a norm inside the newsroom in the Emirates, and is evident in the articles of *The Charter of Honour and Code of Ethics*⁵⁴, which was officially released by the UAE Journalists' Association (UAEJA) in 2008 following the UAE's Vice President's statement on not imprisoning journalists, but which, to date,

⁵⁴ It's noteworthy to explain that the UAE's *Charter of Honour and Code of Ethics* for the media differs from the *Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct*, which was issued by The Federal Authority for Government Human Resources in 2010 for civil services in the UAE.

has not become an Emiri [royal] decree. As explained in chapter two, journalists and press agencies in the Emirates have complied with the articles of the outdated Printing Press and Publication Law, released in 1980. According to this legislation, those holding political power within the governing Ministry of Information and Culture control the ownership of media outlets: under articles 2 and 3: 'no one is allowed to operate a printing press unless he obtains a licence as per provisions of this law. The proper authority at the ministry shall approve or not approve the application' (the UAE Federal Government, 1980, p.2). Not only is the ownership of media outlets controlled, but the ministry also demands the identity of journalists to be revealed and the publication of press materials monitored at all times by the censors, who according to the law 'are empowered to confiscate materials and tools used in committing offences' (Ibid., p.17). In article 9 of the law, for instance, it states that: 'the owner of the printing press shall keep a record stamped by the ministry, to record titles of material pending publishing, names of the material originators and number of copies printed from that material. The owner shall submit the record to the proper authority at the ministry' (Ibid., p.3). Moreover, in article 11 of the law, it states that: 'ten copies of the published material shall be submitted by the printing house to the censorship department at the ministry' (Ibid., p.4). By so doing, censors can decide on whether to release the press materials or ban them.

In chapters four and seven of this outdated law, a minor list of articles has been created to dictate ethical standards for journalists. This list has been published without being clearly referenced as a code of ethics, but it is generally understood in this way and is the list, which the Emirati and expat journalists who were observed and interviewed for this study were adhering to, as the next finding chapters will reveal. For example, article 28 states that a journalist shall not commit 'an offence involving moral turpitude' to which he or she will be 'ordered to leave the country for an offence related to publishing' (the UAE Federal Government, 1980, p.18). Moreover, articles 72 and 73 state that 'no opinions shall be published if they violate public discipline and order, or involve insult, or call for or circulate subversive ideas', and 'provokes action of dissension among individuals of society' (Ibid., p.18).

In addition, journalists in the Emirates are required to be impartial while reporting in order not to 'publish in bad faith any false news, or forge or tamper documents' or

‘cause damage to the national economy’ as stated in articles 80 and 81 of the 1980 law (the UAE Federal Government, 1980, p.19). Articles 82 and 84 dictate that journalists, as part of the code of ethics published in 1980, should not use in writing ‘any phrases, expressions or pictures that are inconsistent with public conduct, or mislead [the] public’ (Ibid., p.19), or write news to criticize ‘a public official, or anybody occupying a post in the public prosecution’ (Ibid., p.20). Failing to comply with this outdated Printing Press and Publication Law will result in the imprisonment of the journalist and the editor-in-chief, enforcement of high fines, and the closing down of the newspaper (Ibid.).

Under the 1980 law, it has been clearly stated that the media is ‘free within the limits’ (the UAE Federal Government, 1980, p.25). However, it is subject to grave punishment, if it: ‘defames Islamic beliefs or incites hatred against the system of ruling, or causes harm to the supreme interests of the country, or publishes materials that cause damage to the constitution, particularly to the concept of unity and federation, or threatens public order, or serves foreign interests that contradict national interests, or publishes ideas of a hostile country, or discloses military secrets, or publishes materials that cause confusion among the public’ (Ibid., p.23).

The release of the 26 articles of *The Charter of Honour and Code of Ethics* in 2008, as mentioned above, however, did not free the media or eliminates such limitations to free expression. Rather, the code demands that journalists practise their profession responsibly and in line with the government’s policies in order to sustain social stability and its freedom from any deemed threats. For instance, article 10 asserts that ‘journalists should not seek to provoke or inflame public feelings by any means. They should not use the media for the purpose of libel or slandering’ (Gulf News, 2008). Similarly, article 12 asserts that ‘journalists should be very vigilant to traps of discrimination and avoid involving themselves by any means in any stories hinting at discrimination of race, sex, language, faith or national and social background’ (Ibid.).

Moreover, the Code of Ethics for the UAE media emphasizes the role of responsible reporting from a professional perspective. This is in place of taking the opportunity to widen the limited scope given for practising investigative journalism or for exercising

freedom of expression. Rather, it appears to encourage the self-censoring of work and affords little protection of rights, thus making journalists quest towards achieving freedom of the press in the Emirates complicated. While article 2 asserts that 'the journalist must commit himself at all times to the principles of *freedom* in gathering and publishing stories' (Gulf News, 2008), the term 'freedom' as used in the code of ethics is not defined clearly. In another instance, article 23 asserts that 'a journalist has to do his best not to become part of a story, and to cover news not make it' (Ibid.). This would evidently limit the journalist's role as serving as a watchdog for justice within society and ensures that media content across every platform, including social media, is uncritical. This is particularly noticable in article 4, which asserts that a journalist 'should only use legitimate means to obtain information, photos and documents from original sources' (Ibid.). This means that information released and approved by the authorities are the journalist's only legitimate sources for producing news reports.

The remaining codes explain the values of professionalism for journalists in the Emirates and how to maintain them to ensure integrity and honorable journalism as a profession. In *The Charter of Honour and Code of Ethics*, journalists in the Emirates agree to: 'respect the truth and the right of the public to have access to true and accurate information, voice fair and neutral comments and criticism, publish facts from sources known to him [or her], and must not hide any basic and important information, forge facts or falsify documents, rectify any published information that proves to be wrong and harmful to others, should [not] compromise on credibility, should respect the privacy of individuals and not expose them by publishing anything without the consent of those individuals, must be aware that a suspect is innocent until proven guilty, thus names and photos of suspects should not be published until a final verdict is issued, must be very careful in their personal relationships with news sources so these bonds do not leave a bias in their stories, avoid using offending and obscene language in their reports, give credit to the competitor [when using facts published by competitors], must not acquire information or pictures through harassment, temptation or violence, and must not accept valuable cash and gifts [as it] may cause a journalist to be biased in his [or her] coverage and is considered a breach of the code' (Gulf News, 2008).

In addition, a number of articles in *The Charter of Honour and Code of Ethics* were added to regulate the journalistic practises inside the newsroom and regulate the publication of news in the Emirates out of respect to its society and religion. For example, article 5 asserts that 'news and pictures published must be examined carefully for accuracy, and their true meaning must not be altered by editing, in the title or photo caption. All documents must be edited accurately, and any uncertified reports, rumours or speculations must be reported as such. If re-edited or reproduced material is used as a symbolic picture, it should be made clear that it is not a documentary photograph' (Gulf News, 2008). In article 9 it is asserted that 'professionalism and confidentiality should be strictly observed if the source demands anonymity [and that] the journalist has every right to present evidence or expose their source without the source's consent' (Ibid.). Moreover, article 14 asserts that 'in crimes and issues dealing with children, names and photos should not be published', while article 16 asserts that 'the media should refrain from publishing photos of brutal violence and respect the feelings of the public especially children' (Ibid.). On religion and basic human rights, articles 18, 19 and 24 assert that 'Islam is a basic and important component of UAE culture, values and traditions, and respect of divine religions and traditions and values of nations takes centre stage as a mandatory code of ethics for the media and should not be offended or desecrated in any form' (Ibid.). In addition, 'human rights should also be respected and valued and should not be abused by the media under any pretext' (Ibid.), and that 'coverage of medical cases must not be sensational, as this can lead to spreading fear or unrealistic hope among readers. Publishing the first stage of results on research and medical achievements must not be portrayed as final and undisputed' (Ibid.).

Articles on intellectual rights and fair competition within this profession have also been added in *The Charter of Honour and Code of Ethics*. For example, article 20 asserts that 'plagiarism, misinterpretation, libel, slandering, censure, defamation, allegations and accepting bribery to publish or hide information are all dangerous professional violations' (Gulf News, 2008). Moreover, 'competing for news, pictures and information is a right, provided practising such competition is honest and clear and does not hinder the work of colleagues in competing publications' (Ibid.).

Another issue rises in the media context where expat journalists, Arabs included, practise a form of shadowing with the aim being to teach journalism to Emirati journalists from their own perspective bringing to the fore the differences in their prior journalistic experiences. These could involve experiences lived in fear under a dictatorship that forced them to implement the practise of self-censorship in the newsroom. Alternatively, their experiences could be lived in a democratic nation that allowed them to play key roles as watchdogs and change makers, working to bring about political and socio-cultural progress within their society.

This complexity in itself has created further issues inside the newsroom amongst Emirati and expat journalists, where professional competition over producing significant and hard-edge news is overshadowed by several challenges including professional stereotypes that are defined by ethnic groups. For instance, Arab journalists from the Levant are believed to be far more proficient in making and analyzing news in the Arabic language, whether in print or in broadcast media. The intensity of their presence in the newsroom and at local media corporations has created a sense of monopoly in which Emirati journalists feel under-represented. The latter feel that they are treated with discrimination in terms of career development. Moreover, some are confused as they try to figure out their national identity, being challenged to balance the preservation of their ancient heritage and traditions in the presence of multiculturalism and diversity within present day society. These themes are discussed at length in chapter five.

The challenge of professional stereotyping is also extended to local newsrooms where the media content is produced in English. Emirati journalists, young graduates in particular, feel under-represented, despite their sufficiency in producing and writing news stories for English-run television channels and dailies. This is due to the strong presence of expats in managing the editorial newsrooms. In addition, many expats in English-speaking newsrooms comply with critical-free journalism to be in line with the government's policies concerning the publication of media content to the general public. They often avoid the discussion of topics that are considered religiously and culturally offensive in order to protect themselves from deportation or imprisonment. As a result, this limits young Emirati media graduates' chances to engage in investigative journalism in privately owned newspapers. This compound any pre-

existing sense of confusion after spending almost four academic years studying about media ethics and free speech. Separately, systematic news broadcasting in English is an issue that I have observed at Dubai Media Incorporations' studios. In contrast, it was difficult to observe this inside the newsrooms of local English newspapers in Abu Dhabi and Dubai because my request to access the newsroom of a couple of dailies, namely, the Gulf News and The National, was denied. This is despite the fact that *The Charter of Honour and Code of Ethics* assures that the right to access public information is guaranteed as stated in article 1 of the code of ethics, in which the media is committed to respect 'the truth and the right of the public to have access to the true and accurate information' (WAM, 2007).

In view of this, the content of the bilingual print media, daily newspapers in particular, and local news broadcasting in the Emirates are considered loyal and critical free. As an observer of the local news production, it is evident that domestic stories dominate, such as those concerning: ministerial activities, announcements released by the royal court and federal authorities, as well as events pertaining to society including health, employment, education, sports, and culture. Some daily newspapers dedicated a few pages to cover international news that matters to the expat communities, such as recent events taking place in India, Pakistan or the Philippines.

The emergence of social media platforms has altered the coverage of local news as the public, Emiratis and expats alike, contribute in news making with posts featuring photography and videography content. They are assisting traditional journalists by lifting part of the limitations on news coverage concerning often neglected issues such as Emiratising vital economic sectors and protecting migrant workers' rights in an attempt to sway public opinion and provoke decision makers such as the members of the parliament at the Federal National Council (FNC).

The excessive media surveillance by the authorities, including that of social media platforms such as Twitter, has added to the list of challenges regarding press freedom and best journalistic practises. Mostly, Emirati journalists practise self-censorship religiously but a number of Emirati social media activists have been detained or imprisoned for spreading false news and cybercrime related violations. For example, Obaid Al Zaabi who criticized the lack of free speech in the Emirates during a televised

interview with CNN in 2013 (Duffy, 2014). In addition, numerous attempts by international journalists to tackle unpleasant issues in the Emirates have led to their deportation. One such case is the Irish journalist Sean O'Driscoll, who published an investigative feature about the inhuman treatment of migrant labourers in Abu Dhabi for *The Guardian* newspaper in 2014 (Schlanger, 2015).

In conclusion, defining the roles and responsibilities of journalists in the Emirates remains debatable. The political powerful's influence over the media environment through subsidies and censorship exacerbates the situation as the state aims to protect the public from external socio-political threats transmitted by the regional and international media. Understandably, the state fears that these forces can divide Emirati society's unity and identity. At the same time, the state wants to develop a media infrastructure by turning the Emirates into a media hub that hosts internationally acclaimed channels and news agencies such as CNN, BBC and Reuters to expand the art, entertainment, and cultural scenes in the country, which will result in the growth of tourism and non-oil sectors. In addition, through the control of media, the state can create a tailored media context that is put in use to serve its political propaganda. Most recently, tolerance, with awareness of religious freedom, has been used heavily as a brand by the government in 2019. Through this brand, the state has positioned itself as an international political power player by embracing all faiths, including Judaism, launching new projects such as the Abrahamic Family House, where a church, mosque and synagogue will be built in one place for the first time in the gulf region by 2022, and striking historical ties with the state of Israel.

CHAPTER FIVE

The Journalistic Experience of Emirati Women

Part One of the Participant Observation and the Semi-Structured Interviews Analysis

As the role of women journalists in the Emirati media remains largely under-examined, I was determined to understand the socio-cultural factors that affect their presence in this vital industry. This I decided to undertake by contrasting their experiences in journalism with those of their female counterparts located elsewhere in order to investigate by using participant observation and semi-structured interviews which elements of newsroom practises are related to gender and which elements are not. The two focal media outlets were the Dubai News Centre and Abu Dhabi News Centre. Through the observations⁵⁵ and in-depth testimonials⁵⁶, I will show how socio-cultural restrictions and the intentional institutionalized engagements inside the newsroom can disempower Emirati female journalists and put them at a disadvantage in relation to their male colleagues. The Emirati female journalists interviewed, believed that ‘men take charge’ while women ‘take care’; confirming their inferiority not only at home, but also in the workplace, which has resulted in discrimination in the career development and opportunities for Emirati female journalists. I will also unveil Emirati female journalists’ perspectives on genderization and discrimination in the Emirates.

The observations and in-depth testimonials will be covered and analysed extensively in chapters five, six, and seven. The findings will focus on three main themes: the first theme is addressed in chapter five and covers the journalistic experience of Emirati women. This will compare Emirati women journalists’ experiences with those of their female counterparts elsewhere, in terms of dealing with dynamic gender politics inside the newsroom. The second theme that is handled in chapter six pertains to gender, media and the social structure in the Emirates. This investigates how gender as an identity marker intersects with other markers such as tribe, family, and class in the

⁵⁵ For the full observation notes, please see the appendices section. The original handwritten notes are available as a PDF file and can be provided upon request.

⁵⁶ All interviews were conducted in the Arabic language, except for one. The testimonials included in chapters five, six and seven were translated into English by the author. Full transcripts are available upon request.

Emirates. The third and final theme that is unpacked in chapter seven is the state's role in Emirati women's empowerment. This addresses the anomalies that arise with regards to the Emirati government's approaches to empower them while at the same time holding on to tradition in the face of rapid social change. Emirati women are presented as the carriers of the so-called 'traditions' that those in power select and reinvent according to their own purposes.

The theme covered in this chapter, the journalistic experience of Emirati women, will be categorized under two sections: (1) elements of gendered newsroom practises, and (2) elements of non-gendered newsroom practises.

5.1 Elements of Gendered Newsroom Practises

Throughout history and up to this day, women journalists have shared similar experiences: they were exposed to the patriarchal gender bias inside the newsroom, and were treated as inferiors because of their gender, their empathy, their sensitivity, and their communication skills. Despite their vast experience in practising investigative journalism to provide the public with news that mirrors the positive and negative realities of the society, such as the work of Kuwaiti journalist Nouria Al Saddani and the work of British political correspondent Kate Ironside, women journalists have encountered unexpected resistance from misogynists, who occupied leading positions in media corporations, who disempowered them at every opportunity, simply because their journalistic talents were seen as a threat.

Women journalists' experiences indicate a mindset of misogyny and sexism, the universal phenomenon in which men fear the rise of women, and impose limits on their capabilities. As described by Amal Al Malki in her study on old stereotypes and new media, these limits are, unfortunately, 'routinely policed by women' (2012, p.112), as men assign them to the role of sexual, seductive beings only, insisting that women's nature requires them to master the art of what they view as genetic inferiority, through silencing their own voices and acting powerless. These ideas have been traded as beliefs since the creation of humanity to the evolution of monotheism; and lawmakers and theologians have popularized the concept of men's superiority to encourage women's oppression.

Under these circumstances, I unveiled through observing the newsroom norms in Dubai and Abu Dhabi News Centres and through the recorded testimonials of the 22 Emirati women journalists and the nine Arab expat women journalists that women journalists in the East and the West share a universal obstacle. There are two elements of newsroom practises that disempower their creativity: gendered such as gender stereotyping and clustering, sexism, and misogyny, and non-gendered such as the practise of self-censorship and patriotic journalism. Other non-gendered elements that were investigated for this study, in particular, that will be discussed at length include: the deficiency in Arabic language among the younger generation of Emirati male and female journalists and the impact of PR agencies on journalism practises in the Emirates.

The gendered and non-gendered elements of newsroom practises have put women journalists under what Amal Al Malki described as 'social passivity' (2012, p.41), where women deal with psychological restrictions or institutional engagements in the workplace that limit decision-making and make them feel embarrassed, humiliated and pressured (cited in Al Malki et al., 2012, p.41). The story of Saudi journalist Manal Al Sharif, who works for *Al Watan* newspaper, is a good example of a commonly shared experience of internalized or institutionalized passivity by women journalists everywhere. Al Sharif criticised the Saudi government for neglecting to investigate the condition of women journalists in Saudi media corporations, where their rights "are ignored" and "they do not receive the recognition they deserve" (Ibid., p.42).

The observations and in-depth testimonials with the 30 chosen Emirati and Arab expat women journalists for this study proved that women remain underrepresented in the media. They are either eclipsed in hard news, as described by Amal Al Malki, or fantasized in "women's media" (cited in Al Malki et al., 2012, p.21). In the latter, the women's presence is limited to gender segmented news coverage of topics like childcare, family welfare, fashion and cookery. Alternatively, they are portrayed as beauty objects, especially those who work as news anchors and broadcasters for talk shows dedicated mainly to women. As Magda Abu-Fadil (2004) argued: 'Arab women reporters and editors face various types of harassment on the job. If they are attractive, it makes the challenge of proving themselves doubly difficult. Jealousy by co-workers from both sexes is no different from Western models, with the added disadvantage

that male colleagues in Arab corporations may tend to be more chauvinistic and patronizing' (cited in Abu-Fadil, 2004, p.200). In light of this, the struggle for equal representation inside the newsroom and the negative portrayal of women in media are universal, as disclosed by Inter Press Service (IPS) through its gender wire division. In 2011, IPS stated that women form 'half the world's population, but not with half of the share of wealth, wellbeing and opportunity. And certainly, women do not get half of media attention, or an equal voice in expression – only 22 percent of the voices you hear and read in the news today are women's' (cited in Al Malki et al., 2012, p.15).

Furthermore, the media plays an influential role in maintaining gendered conceptions and stereotypes, not only about gender roles, but also about appearance, promoting for women an unrealistic, flawless, and ultimately sexist image on television through newsreaders (Mitra, 2014). This is evident on Arab news broadcasting channels, and has become a topic of study in recent years, often referred to as the 'culture of satellite television female presenters'. In an article published in the leading Kuwaiti daily newspaper *Al Qabas* in 2006, it was stated that 'female presenters have become the dream girls or model women for Arab teenagers and men in general. Every young man sees Arab female presenters as the model of beauty he seeks in his dream girl' (cited in Darwish, 2009, p.285). *Al Jazeera* newsreader Khadijah bin Guenna suggested in an interview that Arab female presenters are being used as 'eye candy for the viewers' by some Arab satellite television networks, which 'give women jobs that require wearing a smile all the time or on the basis of external beauty' (Ibid., p.286). The importance that Arab satellite television networks place on female beauty was demonstrated in the decision of the Egyptian Radio and Television Union to suspend eight female television presenters, who had been attacked by the Egyptian public on social media, and labelled as *bakabozza*, meaning fat (Cairo Scene, 2016). To protect the reputation of Egyptian state television, the presenters, who included Mervat Negm and Yomna Hassan from Channel One, and Khadija Khattab and Sara El Hilali from Channel Two, were ordered to follow a weight loss plan for a month, and to resume work only once they had achieved the standards of appearance set by the state television (Ibid.).

The negative portrayal of female news anchors and broadcasters as 'eye candy' or 'dream girls' was apparent when I observed Emirati women news anchors' exotic

looks, heavy eye makeup, and embellished veiling. They seem to accept their treatment as beauty objects and do not find it discriminatory, and they pay attention to their glamour, as opposed to their intellectual power. The Emirati women news anchors I observed are evidently concerned with their makeup, hair, and clothing. They tend not to follow the professional dress and makeup codes given to them by the appearance department at both news centres, preferring to outsource to local designers for their attire, often a popular designer boutique, which will receive a credit at the end of the broadcast. In addition, Emirati women news anchors don't depend on the professional makeup experts who work inside the studios, preferring popular Lebanese or Emirati makeup artists, who specialize in weddings and occasions. This particular attitude has itself become a source of laughter and teasing by male colleagues. In Abu Dhabi newsroom, a senior male editor joked, as an Emirati female news anchor was busy fixing her makeup, that: "there's no need to add more makeup or to fix it!" Then, in front of the entire team in the newsroom, he peaked into her small Harrods utility bag, took her perfume and tried it on himself. However, I also observed Emirati male news anchors paying attention to their appearance. On one occasion, during a commercial break, I observed a young Emirati male news anchor for Dubai's *Akhbar Al Emarat* looking in a mirror hidden under the table to adjust his *ghutra*⁵⁷, and taking a selfie for his followers on Instagram. Reflecting after the completion of my observations, I consider the management at both news centres responsible for portraying news anchors, regardless of their gender, as beauty objects. They choose young, attractive Emirati men and women, who conform to the ideal body shape, which perpetuates the stereotype of beauty over brains.

Observing Emirati men and women news anchors' attitudes to work in the newsroom raised the question as to why women's beauty, specifically, is prized in the broadcast media in a religious, conservative culture? When he developed the grain of truth hypothesis to study the formation of stereotypes, American psychologist Donald Thomas Campbell (1967) argued that the subconscious preconception of gender roles creates stereotypes that are embedded within certain beliefs and expectations, causing the unintended practise of discrimination (cited in Mayo and Henley, 1981,

⁵⁷ Better-known in the Middle East as *Keffiyeh*, *ghutra* is an Arabic word for a long traditional garment used by men in the Arabian Gulf to cover head and shoulders, as part of their traditional day-to-day clothing. It's tied on the head with a black piece of cord, known commonly as *aghal*.

p.43). Adding to this, during a panel discussion at the 2014 Arab Media Forum in Dubai, entitled 'Qualifications: Pretty Face', Emirati writer and media critic Maryam Al Kaabi argued that capitalism had led Arab satellite television networks to use women as attractive commodities, to increase audience ratings (cited in Arab Media Forum, 2014). She claimed that (Ibid.):

The Arab media is filled with fakes where beauty is given priority over substance, compromising the seriousness of the contents. Has the qualification of anchors been reduced to physical beauty and style? What happens to substance, intellect? When you are on a television screen, you do not promote your beauty or looks, but you promote a message.

Nevertheless, bullying and undermining Emirati and Arab expat women journalists' intellectual power by focussing on their biological nature and feminine attributes were practised inside the newsroom of local media corporations, where several Emirati and Arab expat women journalists affirmed encountering direct verbal harassment to belittle their creative work and to bar them from promotional opportunities. Also, external male sources resisted communicating with women journalists simply because they appeared to be of the view that they are unreliable and incompetent in reporting politics and economic news.

Using a pseudonym to hide her real identity, Rawdha, 35, an Emirati journalist in *Zahrat Al Khaleej* magazine, experienced verbal harassment by Emirati and Arab expat male colleagues, as well as male sources, in the beginning of her career, when she worked as a journalist for *Al Ittihad* newspaper, covering both entertainment and the economy. She said:

When I moved to write for the economy supplement in the newspaper, at the age of 22, I noticed discomfort among male colleagues. They had created a network of sources made up of popular businessmen to write news stories; but when I started to rattle their cages by writing outstanding stories, I discovered that some sources refused to communicate with me, preferring to talk with any of the male journalists in the section. When I succeeded in doing an exclusive interview with the Secretary General of the Arab League, Amr Moussa, at the World Free Zones Convention in Doha, Qatar, the entire editorial content with statements was never published in the newspaper! I knew later that an Emirati

male senior editor did not want my name and profile as a journalist to be raised.

My male colleagues were unfair to me, and I wasn't given credit for my work. Because of these incidents, I decided to move back to the entertainment section. I think that working in an environment where men and women interact results in these scenarios. When I ate my lunch, for instance, a male colleague would tell me: "you have gained weight!", or would stare at me in a curious way to ask me: "are your eyelashes real or fake?" He doesn't have the right to make fun of my body, or my clothes, or my voice, or even my perfume, but men generally think that women at the workplace communicate with them to flirt, not for professional purposes. I even received marriage proposals!

There was another male colleague, an Emirati, who labeled me as 'Miss Universe' of the corporation! He specialized in writing poetry columns for the newspaper's weekly culture supplement. To my embarrassment, he would often sign his poetry column with the words *Dedicated to F*⁵⁸, print the press clipping and leave it on my desk. The editor-in-chief was completely unaware of the hidden messages behind his signed off poetry. I didn't report this harasser to the HR department because I felt ashamed.

Yusra Adil, 29, an Emirati editor of external politics in *Al Ittihad* newspaper, had to put up with her male colleagues' sarcasm, who categorized her as too beautiful for brains! At the beginning of her career at the newspaper, her editorial features on international politics were never published due to jealousy, and she was offered a promotion only if she agreed to write for another section within the newspaper. She said:

Because of my male colleagues' constant criticism and sarcasm, I was not able to produce a single political feature for one year. They would say: "you are a girl! What do you want to do with politics!" One male colleague said to me: "you are very pretty, why don't you write in entertainment instead of politics?" He was a misogynist. He strongly disagreed with women's emancipation in the workplace. My male colleagues would laugh at me when I talked politics too! They would say: "you know about the Russian annexation!" I take their comments as a joke and deal with them coldly. The management has also offered me a promotion, but only if I give up my current job position!

⁵⁸ The first letter of her real name.

Rasha Tubeileh, 34, a Jordanian journalist for *Al Ittihad* newspaper, faced challenges at the beginning of her career in terms of dealing with external sources when she worked for *Alghad* newspaper in Amman. She said:

I faced some challenges at the beginning of my career. Sources refused to collaborate with me, or even take me seriously as a journalist because I was a woman, very young in age, and lacked experience. I find this judgment so unfair; a person should never be judged based on age and years of experience. I don't deny that there were times when I felt daunted and demotivated.

Women journalists' struggle to breakthrough and to be heard was evident in the Emirati broadcast media too, where the female voice is generally considered undesirable, unless it is being used to report human interest stories. Mahra Al Jenaibi, 28, an Emirati reporter, who works for Abu Dhabi Television Channel One, reporting for *Oloum Al Dar* news broadcast since 2014, explained this:

Professionally, one of the main challenges derives from the senior editors and managers here, who often prefer to choose male reporters, rather than female reporters, to cover important events and conferences. They always have an excuse: either that the female voice is desirable for human interest stories only, or that women do not have the capabilities to create influential news like men!

There is a level of discrimination. I mean, observe *Oloum Al Dar* news broadcast, and you will find that male reporters only appear in reports relating to the royal court and rulers. Female reporters don't appear in such reports, not even to do the voice-overs. In fact, the management told us about this protocol directly. I don't know if it really is a protocol thing, or just a decision made by the upper management, but they told me that they don't like female voices, except for reading the LVO from the teleprompter, which apparently a female news host is allowed to do.

Apart from this, women journalists observed and interviewed for this study had to put up with another form of gender politics inside the newsroom that rendered them marginal or trivialized (Al Malki, 2012). Author Liesbet van Zoonen (1998) described this phenomenon as the 'trivialization of feminism'. She argued that trivialization has resulted in the rise of a new form of journalism practise, which is 'marked by the emergence of "masculine" and "feminine" styles that can be produced by either male or female journalists: "masculine" styles being traditional, serious journalism, and

“feminine” styles referring to consumer-oriented, market-driven news such as human interest, emotional investment and sensationalism’ (cited in Chambers et al., 2004, p.203).

The daunting experiences of gender stereotyping, gender clustering, discrimination, and trivialization were expressed openly by the 30 Emirati and Arab expat women journalists chosen to participate in the semi-structured interviews. They dealt with misogynist and sexist male colleagues, and were mistreated by the senior editors and executives, who deliberately manipulated their chances of promotion and career development plans. For instance, Lahib Abdulkhaliq, 60, an Iraqi editor of external politics for *Al Ittihad* newspaper, who has more than 30 years of experience in political journalism and has published two political books, *Between Two Collapses: The New American Strategy* and *The Blood Sociology*, explained that working for *Al Ittihad* became her worst nightmare, because of one Arab expat male chief editor, who barred her from promotion, simply because of her status as a woman. She said:

I was downgraded from a grade five senior editor to a grade seven journalist. I used to get a pay check of 35,000 dirhams per month [about £7,000], and now I only get a pay check of 18,000 dirhams per month [about £3,000]. I’ve been suffering from this unfair treatment since 2008. The current [Arab expat] chief editor was a journalist with no experience whatsoever in politics or political analytics, and he was the one who manipulated the promotions list, as well as my job contract, due to the constant disputes between us.

I assure you now that the media community is the worst ever; it’s nothing but rubbish! There are constant disputes; there are people who battle against you in fear of [losing] their positions. We have neglected many causes and only focus on gaining fame and wealth. Journalism is no longer a noble profession. I gave up. My 30 years of experience has been wasted because of the reality of media practises in the Arab world and in the Gulf States. We still live in this male, taboo society that questions women’s capabilities. Even when I started my career in the 1980s, we [females] were few.

Reem Al Breiki, 41, an Emirati senior business journalist in *Al Ittihad* newspaper, strongly believes that the media industry is full of misogynists, who simply think of women as incapable. However, she blames women for sticking with the concept of shame or *Ayeb*, to the extent of banning themselves from every opportunity to rise. Al

Breiki was treated unfairly, demoted, and investigated by the old management, which has recently been replaced. She stated:

Women must overcome the concept of shame or the culture of *Ayeb*, and battle this ignorant perception. My male colleagues would avoid contacting me at night to discuss work-related issues, thinking that I had commitments at home with my husband and family. There are social boundaries. There is discrimination in terms of financial rights, and women are often treated unfairly in this department. Personally, I have been through a difficult situation with the management. It was at a time when [HR] planned to expel a number of Emirati journalists from the older generation, including myself, to bring in 'new blood'! I stood against this unfair treatment.

In the beginning of my career [in 2001], I had great benefits, with the job title of editor. Five years later, we had gone through an organizational restructure that turned all journalists here into desk employees, instead of field reporters. We were restricted by the working hours and pressured by deadlines to submit material, and I was demoted. Promotions were granted randomly, based on favouritism. I faced verbal harassment and rumours inside the newsroom which aimed to "teach me a lesson"! Then, I was suspended from work for three months, while an investigation took place. I was innocent of all the charges put against me; they created a case out of nothing, simply because I defended the older Emirati female journalists at the newspaper, who were treated unfairly. We wrote a grievance letter against the management, which was eventually replaced [with the appointment of Mohamed Al Hammadi as the new editor-in-chief] after all these events.

Being judged constantly and having to deal with executive managers who are misogynists inside the newsroom is an uncommon experience that Leila, 36, an Emirati executive news editor at the Emirates News Agency (WAM) and an alumnus of the University of Westminster, who preferred to use a pseudonym to hide her real identity, described having gone through. She said:

I was elected as the acting head of the English desk. This was six months ago [in 2017] and recently I decided to step down. It was a very big decision for me. As a woman, I find it very difficult and a challenge to be taken seriously. The former head was a male. I had to speak so much louder to get my point across. I felt that I was swimming against the current. One of the reasons why I decided to step down was because I didn't feel I was being recognized or encouraged or given credit for my work. I worked

really hard, I really, really did. As a woman, you feel you have to speak louder to be heard, and your ideas and opinions might not be taken seriously, as one presented by a man; so if I want to say something, I have to keep repeating it and proving and chasing, trying to explain “please let’s think about this.”

I think my boss, I think he tried, I think he believed that he tried his best, I think he really did, in his understanding; but he could have done much more to be more supportive. I think he was harsher on me than the heads of other departments who were male. There was a lot of resistance from the misogynistic older men that I managed, basically. They didn’t like it, to have a female head, I do feel like if you are a man, you are just generally taken more seriously because you have characteristics that are more dominant. When I was the acting head, I asked to have my pay changed, increased to reflect my position, because I had much more responsibility. That didn’t happen, but I don’t know if that has something to do with sexism.

Emirati and Arab expat women journalists have recounted extensively their experiences with the glass ceiling in the newsroom that resulted in limiting their career progression, which is a common problem shared by their female counterparts elsewhere. According to author Deborah Chambers (2004), the term ‘glass ceiling’ was first published in 1986 by the *Wall Street Journal* and was defined by The U.S. Department of Labor as ‘artificial barriers based on attitudinal or organizational biases preventing qualified women or ethnic minorities from advancing into upper management positions and obstructing them from getting assignments that can lead to developing expertise and credibility and, in turn, to promotion’ (cited in Chambers et al., 2004, p.73).

Women journalists worldwide are often blocked from progressing to leading positions at media corporations because of gendered stereotypes concerning their performance in the workplace. This is often regarded as incompetence because of their being distracted by family commitments. This renders women journalists in the eyes of the executives as unfit, unqualified, and ultimately, they are dismissed. In 1999, the International Women’s Media Foundation addressed the issue of gender disparity and glass ceiling by conducting research about media women in 100 countries (Sakr, 2004). This revealed that ‘the difficulty of balancing home and work was one of two basic, universal obstacles facing media women. The other was a lack of role models’ (cited in Sakr, 2004, p.181). The lack of role models for media women was examined

by the U.S. Board Members of the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE), which debated that 'male newspaper executives do not feel comfortable grooming females for top jobs' (Ibid., p.181).

In the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), the glass ceiling and women's representation in media present a similar situation. As Lebanese former reporter May Kahale (2002), who later became the first female media advisor to the then Lebanese President Elias Hrawi⁵⁹, puts it: 'being a woman in the Arab world is a double-edge sword. On the one hand, we benefit from deep respect accorded [to] women in a region where they represent the family's top values as mothers or sisters. But we also suffer because there is little understanding of a woman's need to have a career, or to advance financially outside of [the] traditional social criteria' (cited in Abu-Fadil, 2004, p.197). In the Emirates, media women, Emiratis and Arab expats alike, are often dismissed from promotional opportunities despite their outstanding qualifications. It was only recently that Emirati female journalist, Muna Busamra, was appointed editor-in-chief in 2016, becoming the first and only Emirati female editor-in-chief in the history of Dubai's *Al Bayan* newspaper and in the history of Emirati journalism. Moreover, for this study, out of the 30 Emirati and Arab expat women journalists that were interviewed, only four currently hold leading positions: Fatema Al Senani, age 34, head of operations projects (Abu Dhabi Media Company), Ameena Awadh Bin Amro, age 38, head of electronic publishing (*Al Ittihad*), Heyam Obaid Bawazir, age 41, head of news output (Abu Dhabi Television Channel One), and Hala Al Gergawi, age 35, executive managing editor and editor-in-chief (*Zahrat Al Khaleej*).

Despite some advances in economic equality in terms of fair pay at work, Emirati and Arab expat women journalists are conscious of gender disparity, sexism and misogyny in the newsroom, which is practised by both Emirati and Arab expat men journalists, directly and indirectly. However, they feel anxious about reporting it for various reasons, including social stigma (the shame, or *Ayeb*), fear of instability and job loss, and due to family and community pressures.

⁵⁹ Lebanon's tenth president, whose term of office ran from 1989 to 1998.

Prior to joining *Al Ittihad* as an editor of external politics, Lahib worked at Dubai's *Al Bayan* newspaper (from 1999 to 2005), where she became the first female journalist to head the reporters' section (made up of 25 reporters) that reported on international political news. At *Al Bayan*, she edited the content of a weekly, political, four-page supplement known as 'The Wednesday Strategic', and succeeded in conducting an exclusive interview with Taha Yasin Ramadan⁶⁰, the first of its kind to be published in a Gulf State newspaper since the Second Gulf War. However, she felt trapped and suffocated when she moved out to work for Abu Dhabi's *Al Ittihad* newspaper because of the misogynistic treatment. She said:

I faced a cruel battle here because I became very popular; more than my male chief editor. There was and still is a level of jealousy. At one point, the former editor-in-chief asked my chief editor to assign me to write a three-page political feature, but he never told me about this particular assignment. In your opinion, what does that mean? When I confronted the former editor-in-chief he told me that my chief editor had made two different excuses: one, that I cannot write this political feature [through lack of knowledge], and two, that I don't have the time to write it [because of other deadlines].

Because of him, I had constant disputes with the former editor-in-chief. They published all the political features that I wrote and analysed effortlessly without my name. Some colleagues took my side in these disputes, and whenever the chief editor was absent on annual leave, they would print my name on the political features that I wrote, telling me: "write whatever you like, and we will ensure that your name is printed as long as he's away!" I feel trapped and the chief editor doesn't want me to become popular in fear of [losing] his position and chair!

Elaborating on what American reporter Anna Griffin referred to as "institutionalized sexism" (cited in York, 2017). Rasha Tubeileh (*Al Ittihad*), said:

In terms of promotions, there is a level of discrimination. You will rarely find a woman in the position of editor-in-chief. Women's presence is increasing, but they do not take a vital role in leadership positions. In our newspaper, the only female senior

⁶⁰ A prominent Iraqi Kurd, who served as vice president of Iraq from March 1991 to the fall of Saddam Hussein in April 2003.

editor is Moza Matar⁶¹ who works at the newspaper's Dubai office. I think it is related to two factors: the strong competition between men and women, and the social constraints like marriage and parenthood that hold women back from thinking about their career ambitions.

Badria Al Kassar, an Emirati journalist for *Al Ittihad* newspaper, believes that male journalists practise gender discrimination subconsciously, and that they feel intimidated when dealing with unmarried female journalists. She said:

There is no gender inequality. Take me as an example, I can travel with media delegations to cover important events abroad just like any male journalist. Maybe there is a level of discrimination in terms of promotions. Since I started working for *Al Ittihad* newspaper, I haven't been promoted. I submitted a request with a number of other journalists listing our requirements, but the management didn't provide us with a reasonable answer. It would be a big mistake for the management to think that women do not deserve promotion because they will eventually get married and have children. Some prefer unmarried women journalists, while others find unmarried women journalists to be quite bossy, and think it would be very tricky if they were promoted to leadership positions because they would simply take out their negativity on men journalists!

Jalila (a pseudonym), a Jordanian editor at *Al Ittihad* newspaper, who recently [in 2017] won an award from the Arab League for her outstanding media-related research on terrorism, shared her experience of dealing with a jealous male colleague. She said:

In this field, men treat me as incapable and unqualified because, simply, they think that I cannot do my job at night! On one occasion, for instance, I stayed late at work – until 8 p.m. A male colleague, an Egyptian, came across and said to me: “please leave the office. I cannot bare the thought of seeing you away from your daughters!” I replied: “you don't have the right to think that you care about my daughters more than I do.” His intentions were not innocent, but malicious, aimed at the managing editor, to make him question the capabilities of female journalists. I was eventually downgraded from the post of supervisor, which was later given to a male colleague, simply because of these perceptions.

⁶¹ She was elected president for the Women's Media Group in Dubai in 2001. The group, an idea presented to Dubai Press Club with the aim of fostering solidarity among Arab female journalists, remained an idea only, and was never launched as an official organization.

You need to understand that these messages that male colleagues flash all over the office are not sympathetic, but aimed at the managing editors to use their powers to give out promotions, and to eventually get rid of female journalists because their husbands can support them financially. Because of these perceptions, I tried to change the feminine side of my personality; I wore unstylish and unflattering clothes, and wore no make up at all, so that the focus would move away from my body.

I worked as a supervisor for seven years, but after that one particular incident, I was downgraded so easily. Professionally too, when we edit a special supplement for instance, the managing editor would prefer to give this task to a male editor instead of a female editor, even if his writing skills are not outstanding. In terms of the career ladder, it is finite, because we never had a female as head of department and it has nothing to do with a shortage of female employees, not at all.

Rawdha (*Zahrat Al Khaleej*) dealt with an atypical Emirati editor-in-chief, who was a misogynist. She said:

The former editor-in-chief of the newspaper [*Al Ittihad*] was a misogynist. He disliked the idea of empowering women, and never allowed female journalists to reach leading positions in the newspaper, especially as section heads. He believed that men deserved to take the lead because they are simply better at doing the job, especially late at night! I managed a supplement for four years, and my job title remained the same, a journalist.

Instead of promoting me, the former editor-in-chief hired a male journalist from Saudi Arabia for the position, giving him the title of chief editor, just because he was a male. I even asked him to promote me to acting head of the entertainment section, but he refused. I stand by what I have said. Now, after my resignation, the entertainment supplement is no longer published daily, but weekly.

Commenting on how the opposite sex thinks of women, Yusra Adil (*Al Ittihad*) said:

Gender inequality exists everywhere, at every workplace. Men at the media corporations practise bureaucracy in the newsroom and follow a hierarchical style of management. They don't trust women. In men's heads, they only understand one thing: that

women are deficient in intelligence and religion!⁶² We suffer from mental and conceptual restrictions!

Before working as a journalist for *Zahrat Al Khaleej* magazine, Yaqoutah Abdulla Al Dhanhane, 28, an Emirati, worked for a year and a half at *Al Bayan* newspaper in Dubai. She has a different opinion altogether about the general attitudes and the nature of work inside the newsroom, which she said is often driven by favouritism, and where Arab expats battle Emiratis over executive job positions. She said:

Not inequality as much as discrimination between the Emirati journalists and the Arab expat journalists, which definitely existed in my previous workplace [*Al Bayan*]. They [the management] feel apprehensive about the idea of empowering Emirati journalists and allowing them to hold senior positions within the corporation. Most of the Emiratis at that newspaper resigned due to the negative atmosphere in the workplace and the constant battle against us by the Arab expat journalists, who were scared of granting leadership positions to Emiratis!

But for Ameena Awadh Bin Amro, 38, an Emirati head of electronic publishing at *Al Ittihad* newspaper, these challenges that media women face, have nothing to do with genderization, male-dominance, or living in a patriarchal society. To her, it is women's problem, that needs to be addressed, so that women learn how to let go of what she referred to as "self-imposed restrictions". She stated:

The restrictions imposed on women journalists are not corporate or related to the law; on the contrary, there is no such inequality and our salaries are the same. However, the restrictions are self-imposed, they are not even imposed by the family or society. Women and men alike face self-imposed restrictions in accepting one another, I think. Women too put on such restrictions and link it to marriage or the superiority of the husbands. Women need to resist these self-imposed restrictions first, in order to achieve empowerment. The rights of promotion and economic rights are equal. I'm the only woman at *Al Ittihad* to hold the position of head of electronic publishing. To me, only the best professionals who follow best practises in their career have the right to claim a promotion.

⁶² Based on Prophet Muhammad's hadith, which is generally misunderstood by Muslim men. In the hadith, the prophet explained that women generally lack in reason due to their weak memory, and lack in religious commitment due to menstruation that stops them from praying and fasting.

Meanwhile, K.T., 47, a Moroccan law graduate, a senior journalist at *Al Ittihad* newspaper, and a mother of quadruplets, feels that men practise discrimination in general due to concepts learned in childhood. She said:

There is a level of discomfort [with women] due to [men's] mentality and perceptions. I mean some men were raised in patriarchal, male-dominated surroundings, and that in itself has influenced their character. They don't accept the concept of women's emancipation and are often jealous of women's success. I also witness such perceptions when tasks are distributed. Women journalists are not preferred to cover news stories abroad in Japan and the USA for instance. Men journalists are far more preferable for overseas jobs.

We are not encouraged to write outstanding investigative features, which eventually kills the spirit of motivation in any journalist. On one occasion, I took the initiative to attend a two-day conference to cover a certain topic, but my chief editor was not pleased about my absence from the office, and told me to follow the work schedule that he created for me. The chief editor assumed that I attend conferences for tea and chitchats! That is the male mentality! So, with the lack of trust between the employer and employee, as well as the lack of appreciation and credit, routine replaces the true spirit of motivation and initiative in the journalist.

Separately, Emirati and Arab expat male journalists who were interviewed for this study argued that certain roles are male-dominant inside the newsroom. This, they opined was justified for reasons that are associated with social decorum, which editors and executives have to adhere to. Yousef Bustangi, 56, a Palestinian business reporter for *Al Ittihad* newspaper, who has more than 25 years of experience (since 1992), explained:

Because of Arab society's culture and traditions, Arab women maintain family commitments more than Arab men; that's why they [men] get more space and chances to shine in the workplace, not because of gender inequality. Raising children, for instance, would restrict your chances to work out in the field, or to travel abroad to cover certain news stories. That's why men succeed and progress in the workplace.

His colleague, Ali Al Amoudi, 60, an Emirati senior journalist for *Al Ittihad* newspaper, who covered the civil war in Somalia, and published a book entitled *Al Qarn Al Afriqi*⁶³ on his experiences as a war correspondent, had a similar point of view. He said:

Theoretically, there is no gender inequality. However, the Emirati society has certain distinctive attributes. For instance, when there is a public event at night that requires coverage by a journalist, the chief editor would select a male journalist instead of a female journalist out of decency and decorum, although they [females] will not hesitate in taking the initiative to cover public events at night or even to travel on a mission abroad.

From this perspective, assigning tasks that are socially acceptable in terms of decorum for Emirati women journalists, in particular, was a norm that I personally observed in the male-dominated newsrooms at Dubai and Abu Dhabi, even though the current chief editor in Dubai is female. In one conversation with a male senior editor in Dubai, where only two Emirati females work as field reporters, he said: “Because of their nature and out of fear for their safety, we tend not to send them [Emirati women] to cover news of accidents, let alone fires or wars, while men, regardless of their age, take the risk and may be killed eventually.”⁶⁴ I disagreed with his point of view, because it presupposes that Emirati women are incapable of covering hard-hitting news from every angle, but only capable of reading and announcing the news to the TV audience. The attitudes and practises of Emirati men towards Emirati women inside the newsroom, reflects the depth of this traditional stereotype about women, which according to Forster (2017, pp. 79-80) have:

Become deeply embedded in the mind-sets of men. They become an integral part of their masculine identities and operate at a largely unconscious level, and this is the main reason it is so difficult to change these after they have become established. In turn, these become part of taken-for-granted cultural beliefs about the intrinsic nature of men and women. These can then lead to the creation of structural barriers, which prevent them from doing certain kinds of jobs or bar them from rising to leadership positions in organizations.

⁶³ Arabic for the ‘Horn of Africa’ (القرن الأفريقي).

⁶⁴ This quote was part of the diary entries at Dubai newsroom. It was written on day six of the observation, on Monday 6th February 2017.

However, as the findings of this study affirmed, there is a group of Emirati and Arab expat male and female journalists who feel that the media sector in the Emirates is not gendered, based on their experiences and positive interactions with each other; and due to the fact that the governing leadership works tirelessly to empower Emirati women and ensure their integration in the media sector, to contribute to the country's development. For example, Fatema Al Senani, 34, an Emirati head of production for Abu Dhabi Media Company, said:

In my role, I receive complete support and trust in my capabilities from my employer. The leadership too supports the emancipation of Emirati women [in the media sector]. Abu Dhabi Media Company, during the past three years in particular, hired three Emirati female executive directors, 15 division heads, and 20 supervisors. All are Emirati females.

Mona Al Hmoudi, 27, an Emirati, who works as an investigator for *Al Ittihad* newspaper, believes that the media sector is not male-dominated at all, and that the work environment is stimulating. She said:

Male and female journalists work together in harmony as one team, and I often play the role of the team leader bossing male journalists around when we are required to cover a conference or an event. They would receive orders to accomplish a certain task from me directly without complaint. My male colleagues are competent, mindful of the teamwork spirit, and do not compete negatively with their female colleagues. Our work ethics increase motivation, and my male colleagues trust my professional judgment. Distributing work among us is definitely exciting! Everything here is offered equally [salary and training courses].

Hana Al Hamadi, 45, an Emirati senior journalist for *Al Ittihad* newspaper, is known amongst her colleagues for writing bold features about marital infidelity, abortion, foster parents, and women prisoners [drug addicts]. Her account reinforces Al Hmoudi's statement. Al Hamadi said:

The media industry is not male-dominated. Men and women work together like bees in a hive, because at the end of the day, we all represent the newspaper. In addition, the senior editor of our division [a man] never misses an opportunity to express his appreciation for our success in covering news stories during staff meetings. There is no such discrimination in terms of the working

hours, the distribution of work shifts, and receiving training courses. Employees can freely select training courses that fit their career development requirements.

Moza Fikri, 54, who became the first Emirati female digital media managing editor in *Al Bayan* newspaper, is very loyal to her workplace, which she joined in 1996. She is grateful to both the newspaper's executive management and the governing leadership for empowering Emirati women in the media sector. She proudly stated:

I haven't faced any challenges in dealing with my chief editors and directors [all males]. That's why I am loyal to this workplace and will never leave it. I have witnessed several organizational changes inside the corporation and dealt with different directors [males], who have treated me with total respect. We live in a country that empowers women and champion women's emancipation in the workplace. This stereotype does not exist any more, of male-dominance, and the proof is this: I am a female, who was appointed to managing editor for an entire department. In the media industry [in the Emirates], there is no gender inequality – not even during the nineties.

Shamsa Saif Al Hanaee, 29, an Emirati, became the first and youngest female sports reporter for *Al Ittihad* newspaper, and became the first to introduce a weekly supplement on women's sports. She thinks that the working environment in *Al Ittihad* reflects gender equality at every level, even in terms of salaries and promotions. She explained:

Everyone working here is cooperative; even [male] sources who I interview are cooperative too. They are impressed by the fact that an Emirati female reporter is present to cover their activities; they always say that to me. Looking at my current status and tasks, I think that I'm being paid fairly. All male journalists here have a long experience in sports reporting; some have 15 years... while I only have two... But I managed to overcome [career] challenges because they helped me develop. We work as one team here, like a family. When I am absent on medical leave, for instance, my male colleague would volunteer to cover an event on my behalf, then write the feature and publish it under my full name. I do the same for them.

A postgraduate in international law from the Paris-Sorbonne University in Abu Dhabi, Abdulla Abdulkarim, 38, an Emirati senior editor of economic news for *Al Bayan*

newspaper, appreciates women's presence in this field, but he admits that he envies Emirati women for all the support they receive from the country's leadership and from the executive management at local entities, including at the newspaper. He said:

There is no gender inequality in the media industry or any other industry [in the Emirates]. Women receive complete support, and we [men] are jealous of that! My editor-in-chief is female; her name is Muna Busamra. She is an intellectual with a mastermind for journalism. I deal with her every day in my position as an acting head, and she is often critical and judgmental of my work, but I completely accept that because it's professional. I don't really care if the editor-in-chief is male or female as long as they are professional and sufficiently well-practised.

Remarkably, Salam Abu Shihab, 52, a Palestinian who works as manager of *Al Khaleej* newspaper's office in Abu Dhabi, prefers to hire female instead of male journalists. He explained:

I honestly prefer appointing female journalists because they are more determined and productive than male journalists. Female journalists engage more effectively with the public and write influential features on community related causes, and naturally, female journalists are more sensitive and emotional; you can see that through their writings. They are more human in the sense that they write from the heart, giving any cause huge importance and significance.

In this office, there are 25 journalists of which 50% are female. One of the female journalists at this office is 48 years old, her daughters are all married, and she is still very productive and writes outstanding features in the culture section. Emirati female journalists are creative and empowered too; I receive hundreds of [Emirati] interns to be trained at the office for six to eight months, but unfortunately, they refuse to practise journalism in a newspaper, preferring instead to work in a government press office, because it offers better salaries and tempting [childcare and housing] benefits in the job contract.

A.D. 38, a Palestinian business reporter for *Al Khaleej* newspaper, doesn't mind working closely with female journalists, even if he receives a lower salary than them. He admitted:

My female colleague receives a higher salary than me, although we started working at the newspaper in the same year, but it didn't make me feel discriminated against. I know for a fact that

her work is outstanding because her Arabic language is stronger than mine, and she has a Master's degree too. Hard work pays off, I think.

The findings discussed above demonstrated the universality of women journalists' experiences with gender disparity, glass ceiling, sexism, and stereotypes in the Emirates and elsewhere. Yet, there is a lack of accurate statistics and figures about the number of Emirati women in the media and of their role in journalism specifically. I was not able to access this fully when I entered the newsrooms, nor find information in official government documents or on websites. What has been discovered so far is that the number of Emirati female journalists, who have become members in the UAE Journalists' Association, reached 163 in 2014 (Al Bakour, 2014). In addition, in a study entitled *A Profile of Women Journalists in the United Arab Emirates*, Dr. Mohammad Kirat (2004) revealed that 'over 80 percent of the working journalists in the UAE are expatriates from the Middle East and South East Asia' (cited in Kirat, 2004, p.55), while 'women journalists represent only 20 percent of the journalistic corps in the country and that only 15 percent of these are UAE nationals, the remaining 85 percent of this 20 percent being expatriates' (Ibid., p.73).

For the past 30 years, following the country's political independence in 1971, Emirati women have been misrepresented in the field of journalism due to gender politics, gendered stereotypes, and male dominance. During a lecture on women in journalism (2004) Aisha Sultan, an Emirati columnist for the Dubai Arabic daily newspaper *Al Bayan*, stated that '[m]edia is considered one of the most difficult and interesting fields, and journalism is a real challenge to the potential of Arab women in general, and Gulf women in particular. Women in developing countries have to face the biased male mentality seeking to marginalize the effective role of women in the profession of journalism' (cited in Khaleej Times, 2004).

5.2 Elements of Non-gendered Newsroom Practises

Based on my observations and the in-depth semi-structured interviews, I found that Emirati newsrooms are engulfed with excessive censorship. This was apparent owing to the presence of censorship and content divisions that are responsible for monitoring the storyboard and monitoring the publication of news features at every media

corporation. I also found that Emirati and expat male and female journalists, Arabs and foreigners alike, who form 85 percent of the journalistic corps in the country, practise self-censorship blindly; creating a silenced media that does not report transparently on critical issues within Emirati society.

The dominance of censorship and self-censorship as non-gendered newsroom practises in the Emirates have impacted the journalistic writings and skills of male and female journalists generally. This puts limitations on their freedom of expression and inhibits a free press in the country, which was ranked in 118th place out of 180 countries for the absence of media freedom by the World Press Freedom Index, Reporters Without Borders (cited in Bardsley, 2015). When I observed Dubai's *Akhbar Al Emarat* and Abu Dhabi's *Oloum Al Dar* teams and interviewed 40 Emirati and Arab expat journalists for this study, I realized that they seemed to be aware of the red lines, or the so-called 'triangle', that determines the main three taboo subjects: religion, politics, and sex. Unlike the early generation of pioneer Emirati and Arab expat journalists, who formed the golden era of Emirati press through publishing bold news stories during the 1970s to the 1990s, some of the new generation seemed to be unaware of the penal codes of the media law, which dates back to 1980. They are confident in the practise of self-censorship; believing it to save them from trouble and helping them produce news that is in keeping with the country's agendas. A few of them were frustrated about current media, but they did nothing to change it. For example, any bold features that they proposed were eventually sidelined, as the following testimonials will reveal.

Mahra (a pseudonym), 65, an Emirati former senior journalist for *Al Azminah Al Arabiya*⁶⁵ magazine and former chief editor in *Awraq*⁶⁶ magazine, who graduated from the college of journalism at Baghdad University in Iraq, believes that the practise of censorship in the Emirates during the early 1980s was not clearly identified by the censors and local authorities. Even though journalists were bold and forward in their

⁶⁵ A weekly political and cultural magazine founded in 1979 by the late Emirati journalist Mohamed Obaid Ghubash. It was banned from publishing by orders of the Ministry of Information and Culture in October 1980. In 1983, Mohamed Obaid Ghubash got a licence to print the magazine in London, but due to financial reasons it closed down in 1994.

⁶⁶ A weekly cultural magazine founded by Emirati journalist Habib Al Sayegh. Privately owned and run, the magazine was published from 1982 to 1995.

writings at that time, they were aware of the sensitive religious and cultural norms in the Emirates and found the censors' standards for censoring their work needlessly oppressively or meaningless. She recalled:

A few of my features were censored either by deleting paragraphs or photographs. For instance, a censor decided to delete a photograph of an art painting that was supposed to be published in one of my cultural features because – from his perspective only – it featured nudity. Most of the time, we weren't aware of the nature of the editorial or pictorial content that censors might delete, they just didn't tell us, it wasn't clear, so we ended up having paragraphs deleted or an entire edition of the magazine censored. One time, a censor deleted a picture, it was a painting by Picasso, because 'it reveals a woman's bosoms' he said!

When I asked Mahra about the level of press freedom at the time she practised journalism, the late 1970s, she replied:

I think that the level of press freedom has gone through several changes. When I practised journalism, the level of press freedom was quite high, and we were able to write bold and critical subjects [on politics and culture], but afterwards, the level of press freedom declined dramatically due to the political environment in the Arab world at that time. But now, I think that the level of press freedom is climbing up again. All journalists practised self-censorship inside the newsroom, and we used to receive censors from the Ministry of Information⁶⁷ and Culture, who would review the editorial and pictorial contents of our magazine – every edition – before it went to print.

During an interview with Mohamed Al Hammadi, an Emirati editor-in-chief of *Al Ittihad* newspaper, it was clear to me that he was trying to convince me that self-censorship is a professional practise. He said:

Naturally, editors-in-chief practise censorship. At the end of the day, they must have a point of view. Everyone practises self-censorship and that is part of the profession, in which you need to understand why you write and when to publish, because that's what matters. For instance, when we face a setback in our

⁶⁷ The Ministry of Information and Culture was terminated in 2006 and replaced by The National Media Council (NMC), a federal government entity that was chaired by Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed, Minister of Foreign Affairs, until 2015.

relationship with Iran, we would write to criticize their political attitude, but when both sides decide to set a round table meeting with the aim of solving matters, we should not write to condemn them again because the timing is wrong. Another thing, we should never associate censorship with fear because a writer must be bold and courageous enough to write; yet again, what is important for a writer is to understand when to be bold and when to write.

Al Hammadi, who has recently published a book entitled *Khareef Al Ikhwan*⁶⁸, writes political columns and specializes in the history of Islamic extremism and the Muslim Brotherhood. He was a member of the press freedom committee at both the UAE Journalists' Association and the Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists' Association (AMEJA). When I asked him about his opinion on the 1980 media law, his answer was thought-provoking. He said:

We tried several times to renew the articles of the media law, but we failed. Unfortunately, the media law does not convey the current changes in the times and the constant development in the field of mass media. The current law is 40 years old and the world is changing 180 degrees. I wrote an article on this subject when the FNC⁶⁹ decided to examine the current law and propose a new one. Their proposal⁷⁰ for the new media law was appalling and does not strengthen the media's role.

In a brief conversation with an editor for *Oloum Al Dar* news broadcast at Abu Dhabi News Centre, who preferred to remain anonymous, I asked about his knowledge of the media law. He said: "I know the restrictions. Of course, it exists. There's no freedom of the press. We're a tool aimed at promoting the government's initiatives. We don't practise investigative reporting." While we were talking, the director of the news centre was giving a tour of the newsroom to an executive Emirati guest. We both paused, and I wondered whether the editor had paused out of fear of talking openly. When I asked him if this was the case, he replied vehemently: "of course not, because he knows exactly what I'm talking about. He is aware of the oppressive media structure. I don't hide anything. I can say it out loud in front of him. I have the right to express my opinion."

⁶⁸ Arabic for 'the autumn of the Muslim Brotherhood' (خريف الإخوان).

⁶⁹ The UAE's Federal National Council.

⁷⁰ The proposal was not approved and the country still uses the 40-year-old media law.

This young Emirati editor believes that he has the right to express his opinion openly, as an individual. However, the current media law and legislation restricts his right of free expression as a journalist and do not protect journalism as a profession. The legal articles and clauses published in the current media law, which was described as draconian by the Human Rights Watch, restrict journalists from openly declaring their views. In article 42 of the law, for instance, a journalist could be imprisoned for a term no less than six months, or pay a fine no less than 1000 dirhams and no more than 10,000 dirhams, if prohibited content was published, and the court may suspend the activity of the newspaper (UAE Federal Government, 1980).

The courts have been involved on various occasions. In 2009, for instance, the Dubai-based Arabic daily newspaper *Al Emarat Al Youm*, had its licence suspended for twenty days as a result of an accusation of libel. Both the editor-in-chief of the newspaper, Sami Al Riyami, and the publisher, Abdul Latif Al Sayegh, were fined 20,000 dirhams. This incident occurred after *Al Emarat Al Youm* published an article in 2006 alleging that Warsan Stables had drugged its racehorses using steroids during a race in Abu Dhabi to enhance their performance (Morris, 2009). Before that, on 2 February 1987, Abu Dhabi-based Arabic daily newspaper *Al Fajir* was suspended for two weeks after publishing an article criticizing the lack of unity in the federation, which was considered offensive and against the greater interests of the country (Jones, 2001, p.2498).

As Deibert has discussed, in response to the low ranking given by the international media organizations to the media in the Emirates, which dropped from 87 to 112, the National Media Council (NMC) issued a new draft of the media law to the Federal National Council (FNC) in January 2009 (2010, pp.591-92). However, the UAE Journalists' Association rejected it because it consisted of 45 articles that restricted media freedom, including 10 articles on penalties and punishments that denied journalists their rights to protection (Ibid.). In addition, the Committee to Protect Journalists also rejected the new draft of the media law and wrote a grievance letter to the UAE's President, asking him to disapprove of it to avoid further negative discussion of the status of media freedom in the country (Ibid.).

In a thesis entitled *The Relationship Between The Press and Political Authority in the UAE*, Rashed argued that political powers control the media by compelling newspapers to publish news stories that promote the government's achievements, and interfering in newspapers' production of news and performance through direct written and unwritten orders, sent by top officials to the newspapers' administrations (cited in BuMetea, 2013, p.25). Not only that, but Rashed suggested that political powers control the appointment of the newspapers' administrative board and editorial staff, to ensure their loyalty to the government (Ibid.).

In this context, Emirati male and female journalists, along with Arab and foreign male and female journalists, who form 85 percent of the journalistic corps in the country, have developed a loyal press that promotes national cohesion and loyalty to country and leadership through television news coverage, which Rugh (2004) has described as the loyalist press. Rugh defines the loyalist press as a tool that promotes the leaders' and government's initiatives, and acts as a backbone to defend their image and reputation from damage by external forces. In the loyalist press, investigative journalism is not practised, and therefore, is absent in the newsroom (Ibid.).

This was evident when I observed the national news broadcast at both news centres, as well as other local news centres⁷¹ across the seven Emirates, which is considered loyal. I observed how male and female editors for Dubai's *Akhbar Al Emarat*⁷² and Abu Dhabi's *Oloum Al Dar*⁷³ compete daily to produce influential national news, with continuous attempts to get exclusive coverage of an event or a statement from a member of the ruling family; a member of the ministerial cabinet when a major conference is held; or a state visit. The daily tasks inside Dubai and Abu Dhabi newsrooms reflect loyalty, yet, these tasks are dominated by repetition and routine. Both teams start with editing a long list of press releases or statements, and a collection of official photographs and videos often developed by press editors and

⁷¹ In the northern emirates, there are a number of media corporations such as Sharjah Media Corporation (which operates four cable channels and two Arabic speaking radio stations), Ajman Independent Studio (for television and radio production), and Fujairah Media Group (which operates two cable channels and four radio stations, of which two are dedicated to Asian expats).

⁷² *Akhbar Al Emarat* team consists of 15 Emirati members, including five female editors, of which three work as news anchors and field reporters jointly.

⁷³ *Oloum Al Dar* team consists of 18 Emirati members, with ten men working as news anchors, editors, and field reporters jointly, and eight women working as news anchors, two women as field reporters, and four women as editors and producers.

camera crews working for the country's official news agency (WAM) and the Security Media, which is run by the Ministry of Interior⁷⁴. This confirms that news in the Emirates is controlled and pre-written in a certain language and format that are dictated by the authorities, and that censorship is not absent, and that media practise in the Emirates is prescribed. According to Deibert (2010, p.591):

The government monitors the press content, and journalists routinely exercise self-censorship. Although the Vice President decreed in 2007 that journalists should not face prison "for reasons related to their work," current media laws allow for the imprisonment of journalists and suspension of publication for publishing "materials that cause confusion among the public".

Emirati male and female journalists interviewed for this study, in particular, have acknowledged the reality of media and journalism practise in the Emirates. Some of them reflected on it as an exercise of patriotic journalism, in which they produce responsible news material to make the public aware of and secure from external threats, while others admitted that this specific reality has divorced them from exercising true journalism and from playing the role of watchdogs, which is not recognized in the Emirates, as explained in chapter four. For instance, Al Senani (Abu Dhabi Media Company) stressed the fact that local media corporations, in general, are tools for the government. She said:

We need to understand a very important issue: as Abu Dhabi television, our role is to support the government's mission. We consider ourselves as a tool of the government. Freedom of practise should be in parallel with the government's mission. We should refrain from broadcasting things that may cause negative reactions or retaliation. The media should follow the government's mission and support it. In the end, you don't work to harm your nation.

Meanwhile, Al Hammadi (*Al Ittihad*) strongly believes that Emirati media is a developed tool, made for people's enlightenment. He stated:

⁷⁴ A media department operated by the Ministry of Interior. It was established in 2008 to act as the governmental communication arm of the Ministry of Interior and Abu Dhabi Police.

I think that the media environment in the Emirates is quite fair and I would describe it as a developed media that runs in parallel with the development of the country. Writers can criticize and express their points of view freely, but responsibly, by presenting proofs and so on. This practise reflects the media culture in the Emirates. I wrote a column in 2000 criticizing the Council of Ministers for renewing the terms of ministers who had served in their positions in the cabinet for almost twenty years. The column was entitled 'How Long Will They Stay?' And was published in the official government newspaper, *Al Ittihad*. By chance, I met one of those ministers that was criticized in my column, and told him that all I wanted from the Council is for them to bring in new blood and fresh ideas.

Salam Abu Shihab (*Al Khaleej*), who spent 33 years (since 1987) writing investigative features on healthcare, also believes that practising self-censorship reflects the journalist's responsibility and professionalism, and that press freedom in the Emirates is high. He said:

I think that the challenges faced by journalists are universal because they try to reveal the truth, while officials and sources of information work hard to hide it. In the UAE, we are not controlled and our work is not censored. There is absolute freedom to write about anything. Self-censorship is a practise that a journalist obeys to determine whether the topic written will serve the society in the first place. As much as we promote the achievements within this society, the faults and negative aspects must be revealed too.

When I asked him explicitly about his views on the media environment, Abu Shihab confirmed again that journalists practise self-censorship not out of fear, but to act responsibly. He said:

We practise self-censorship but it doesn't mean that journalism in the country is restricted or censored by the government. In the 1980s, there was a Ministry of Culture and Information, which was abolished. This reflects my point that the media industry as a whole is not censored. We no longer have a ministry for media in the UAE. The law provides absolute freedom for journalists to practise journalism. However, if a journalist makes a false claim, he or she must be responsible for it and deal with the consequences, especially dealing with the court. During his era, the late Sheikh Zayed encouraged journalists to reveal the truth and every fault of his cabinet and ministries, because journalism

is a tool for enlightenment⁷⁵, for improving things, for correcting mistakes. I think this is the culture of journalism in the UAE.

Furthermore, the answers given by younger Emirati journalists on press freedom were positive but also patriotic. Just like the older generation of Emiratis, the younger generation is keen on working hard to give back and contribute to the nation's development, by supporting the leadership and the federal union, and by preserving its values and heritage and instilling it in their children. The younger generation of Emiratis want to show their patriotism and loyalty to country and monarchy, and to protect its reputation and history from harm; especially the kind that could be done through today's developed digital media. Mona Al Hmoudi (*Al Ittihad*), said:

In our newspaper, we don't allow journalists to fish in troubled waters with the aim of destroying the country's image and reputation. And if we shed light on a negative case, we constantly ensure that we offer solutions for it. When you read the terms and conditions of this [media] law, you realize that it does not restrict your work as a journalist. But there is a level of illegality, so we don't cross the red lines like writing about religion and the divine entity for instance.

Moreover, Abdulkarim (*Al Bayan*) agrees on practising responsible journalism. He said:

During the annual meeting of media professionals with Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid, which I attended to represent the newspaper, he urged us to develop an enlightening media. Journalism is the fourth estate and must be practised responsibly. I practise journalism responsibly and understand the impact of words on people. I practise self-censorship and will not write topics that conflict with the national agenda. *Al Bayan* is neutral, prevents defamation, and is not an opposition newspaper. It will never publish news stories that would harm national security or the country's reputation.

Abdulkarim explained that press freedom in the Emirates has witnessed a gradual growth. He added:

⁷⁵ For a brief description, please see the definitions section.

Press freedom here has witnessed rapid changes in its level, from a historical perspective. To me, if I were to measure the level of *Al Bayan's* freedom since its launch 35 years ago, I would say it has changed rapidly [for the better]. Just like your situation now, from a social perspective, women in the past were not allowed to travel abroad alone to pursue an academic degree, but now the society has become quite open towards this change and to women's equality.

Arab expat male and female journalists interviewed for this study, however, provided me with interesting accounts about their opinions on the media reality in the Emirates. This they find fair and impartial, in contrast to the media reality in other Arab states of which they belong to. They reported that in those places the media environment is either oppressed, putting journalists under constant psychological pressure and fear of the authorities, or freer, providing them with a far more liberating journalistic experience. For instance, Muna Saeed Al Taher, 62, an Iraqi field reporter for *Al Roeya* newspaper, believes that the media law and censorship in the Emirates is fair, and that she never felt threatened in comparison with Iraq, where journalists were under "intellectual siege," as she put it. She explained:

We write within the space given to us, and inside each journalist lives a policeman that practises self-censorship. I come from an oppressive school and lived in a dictatorship [Iraq]. We are guests in this country; that is why we don't reveal the negative side of its society in an unpleasant way in writing, but rather in a polite way. After all, an ideal society does not exist. In Iraq, we lived under a dictatorship, with no freedom of expression. Press freedom did not exist and I never praised that dictatorship [Saddam Hussein's regime] in my writings. International newspapers were banned in Iraq. We were not only starving, but were put under complete cultural and intellectual siege. Even the paper's quality was very poor, and we didn't have enough ink cartridges for the printers.

However, Yousef Bustangi (*Al Ittihad*) strongly believes that press freedom is very high in Jordan due to the increased practise of investigative journalism, whereas in the Emirates, protocol-driven news dominates the media. He said:

In Jordan, I was sued in court three times by three different entities because of my critical economic features, where I revealed stories of fictitious businesses. Of course, I received a

royal pardon in the three court cases. Journalism practised here is very progressive, in terms of using new technologies for publishing, especially now with the emergence of digital media. The Emirates has strong economic and technological infrastructures. However, in terms of the editorial content, protocol-driven news controls public opinion and journalistic practises.

The priority of news coverage goes to the government and its rulers for one particular reason only, the government and rulers are the decision makers here, and their news has a massive influence on the public's lives. It is, therefore, natural that journalistic practise reflects this cultural reality. Journalism in Jordan as a field doesn't possess a developed technological infrastructure, but in terms of practise, it possesses freedom of writing and expression, that's for sure.

Apart from censorship and the excessive practise of self-censorship by male and female journalists in the Emirates, regardless of their nationality, my observations and semi-structured interviews revealed two unusual newsroom practises that are not gendered. One is the rise of PR agencies in the Emirates, affecting the news production, the relationship between journalists and external sources, and the journalism practise in general. The second is the deficiency in reading and speaking Classical Arabic, or *Fussha* among Emirati male and female news anchors and field reporters in both newsrooms.

In this regard, the growth of the advertising industry in the mid-1980s due to the expansion of newspapers and magazines publications, and the increase of television audiences, resulted in the expansion of international PR agencies and firms in the Emirates (cited in Kirat, 2006). These included Pan Gulf PR, Bain Euro RSCG, Gulf Hill and Knowlton, and Headline PR, which established offices in Dubai and Abu Dhabi. As Kirat has discussed, up to 63% of government departments and various semi-governmental and private entities in the country have established in-house public relations departments, to market and manage external communication with the local media using the broad expertise of these international agencies and firms (Ibid.).

Through the interviews that I conducted, I discovered that the relationship between Emirati and Arab expat journalists and PR agents could be cooperative and collective, but for the most part it is engulfed with conflicts and misunderstandings over the

collection of information and communicating with sources. As a result, the presence of over 40 international PR agencies and firms in the country, with a growth rate of over 30% per year (Charron, 1989, p.41), has impacted the practise of journalism and the journalists' motivation to produce hard-edge and exclusive news stories.

J.M., 55, an Emirati reporter for WAM said:

The spread of PR agencies added restraints to journalists' work, and in some areas, it has affected our competence and ability to produce influential news. Now, officials refuse to talk or to give us a short statement, asking that we wait for the publication of the official press release. Even if I manage to interview an official, who would cooperate with me out of respect and trust for my long career experience, I find that the exact statement has already been published as a quote in the PR agency's press release, with extras like statistics and so on. It is daunting, and now, I have reached a point where I feel that I am not contributing anything.

Rasha Tubeileh (*Al Ittihad*), a Jordanian, has found that dealing with local sources has become confusing as well. She said:

In the past, I used to contact any source directly [in the Emirates], even if this source is a minister. However, now, I need to work with a PR agency to get the information needed. In the Emirates, the environment is completely different. I would either work with the PR agency or wait for an official entity to release a statement through its press office. This practise is negative because it limits our access to speak with [local] officials directly and delays the release of the feature for a day or two.

Agreeing with her *Al Ittihad* colleague's point of view, Badria Al Kassar, stated:

In the past, we used to visit local entities to interview senior officials, writing their statements using simple tools like a pen and a notebook, or recording it with a voice recorder. Now, we need to communicate with PR agencies to schedule an interview for us with the [local] source, and we have to submit the list of questions to them. We don't practise journalism professionally any more. Even when we are invited to attend a festival or a forum, PR agencies restrict our work and supply us with what is known as a press kit! The PR agencies' work strategy is completely different, and has resulted in creating a huge gap

between the sources, who no longer communicate openly, and us.

For Jalila (*Al Ittihad*) the overwhelming presence of PR agencies is creating a major crisis in journalism in the Emirates. She explained:

Here, we have a crisis called PR agencies! I see them as a dam that creates barriers between officials and journalists, because it is prohibited for us to receive information without their consent. Such barriers resulted in tepidness; journalism as a profession is no longer real and competition is absent among newspapers because PR agencies have unified all news stories delivered to us, which has resulted in a lack of excellence in practise, and in the lack of finding the 'scoop' for journalists.

Reda El Bawardy, 36, a senior Egyptian field reporter for *Al Roeya* newspaper believes that journalism has turned into "penal labour", now more than ever, with the presence of PR agencies. He said:

The presence of PR agencies is very negative indeed, and I hope that government entities that depend on PR agencies review their role, because it is making our job difficult. So, instead of collaborating with us, PR agencies have turned into a tool that block journalists' access to information, and make officials fear talking with us. There is a huge distance between journalists and sources.

However, Alsayed Salama, 51, an Egyptian senior journalist for *Al Ittihad* newspaper believes that the deficiency of academic programmes in media and the journalists' dependency on emerging media platforms has negatively impacted the practise of journalism, and resulted in media corporations' and government entities' complete dependency on PR agencies. He clarified:

I think that the strong presence of PR agencies, as intermediaries, has occurred due to the journalists' weakness in practising journalism professionally. PR agents are not better than journalists, with all due respect to their efforts, but I think that they only write one side of the story [i.e. raising the local entities' profile by promoting corporate related events and CSR campaigns]. PR agents don't practise journalism, they have affected the reporting process by altering the traditional media-source relation, and only publish what they view as an

appropriate news story, in a specific writing format, and release it at the time of their choice.

While observing the live national news broadcasts in both newsrooms, I discovered that Emirati male and female news anchors, and sometimes field reporters, were poor at reading Classic Arabic fluently to deliver the news. This was especially true of the younger generation, in comparison with the more experienced Emirati news anchors of the 1970s and 80s. The younger generation depend fully upon the news script written by linguist editors, mostly Arab expats from Egypt and Palestine, who are experienced in writing news scripts in an Arabic *Fussha* format. But even though news scripts are written with diacritics that also appear on the teleprompter, I observed Emirati news anchors making errors of pronunciation on a daily basis. For instance, during a commercial break, an Emirati female news anchor at Abu Dhabi newsroom asked the chief editor how to pronounce a guest's name. The chief editor, an Arab expat from Egypt, also told me: "we face a great challenge with the news hosts' pronunciation. It's everywhere, in the entire Arab world, even in Egypt. [*Al Jazeera*, *Al Arabiya*, and *Skynews Arabia* news anchors] are better for sure. They do [receive training], but it's not taken seriously."⁷⁶

On another occasion inside Dubai newsroom, I observed an Emirati female news anchor reading the list of questions written for her for a phone interview with an MP, during live news broadcast. During the two-minute live phone conversation she was entirely dependent on the chief editor, who provided her with instructions on how to cut the MP's answers short through an earpiece, with words like "it's evident, thank you", or "yes", or "briefly please," and so on.

In 1991, the linguist and journalist Allan Bell published an in-depth study on the language of news media. Summarising Bell's argument, Darwish (2009, p.242) states that:

Newsreaders can intentionally affect the meaning of a story through the use of linguistic and paralinguistic clues, which may unintentionally interfere with the content of a story by committing

⁷⁶ This quote was part of the diary entries at Abu Dhabi newsroom. It was written on day seven of the observation, on Monday 20th March 2017.

“bloopers”. The latter problem is more likely to happen when newsreaders are inexperienced or when they are trained by foreigners who apply the elocutionary features of their own languages to another language that is totally different as it is the case with Arabic.

Bell’s theory can be related to Emirati news anchors, who committed bloopers on a daily basis during my observation inside the newsroom. In Dubai newsroom, for instance, some Emirati news anchors don’t rehearse or practise reading the Arabic script and usually only arrive 15 minutes before the news broadcast. They depend solely on the chief editor and linguistic editor to prepare the news script with diacritics.

Besides this, most of the young news anchors have studied mass media at university in the English language, meaning they are fluent in reading the news script in English. This is something that I witnessed inside Dubai newsroom, where a sub channel uses the same studio to broadcast local news for its non-Arabic speaking viewers. There, on one occasion, a young male Emirati news anchor appeared on set wearing traditional dress and started reading the news script in perfect English with an American accent. When I commented on the Arabic language issues among Emirati news anchors, a senior editor in the Dubai newsroom said⁷⁷:

Today, we deal with the ‘OMG’ generation. Unfortunately, there is a common weakness in practising Classical Arabic among the young Emirati TV presenters, due to a lack of interest in reading Arabic literature, or in understanding the language’s complex grammar. The older generation of TV presenters [from the 1970s and 1980s] paid attention to the practise and vocalization of Classical Arabic, in comparison with today’s TV presenters, who seem distracted by various things, especially when they are on air, like their image in front of the camera and on the television screen. They pay close attention to the news director, from whom they receive instructions through an earpiece [to avoid committing mistakes while on air], and so on.

In a study conducted by Andrew Boyd in 1997, he pointed out that ‘a common failing of untrained newsreaders is to imagine that due stress and emphasis means banging

⁷⁷ This quote was part of the diary entries at Dubai newsroom. It was written on day four of the observation, on Tuesday 2nd February 2017.

out every fifth word of a story and ramming the point home by pounding the last word of each sentence' (cited in Darwish, 2009, p.242).

Deficiency in writing and reading Arabic is not the only issue among Emirati news anchors; there is also the problem of using colloquial Arabic, particularly during live phone conversations with guests, as well as among Emirati field reporters when conducting interviews with officials at local events. This rising phenomenon could be devastating for the Arabic-speaking world, where Arab media journalists use colloquial language or *aammiyya* (slang), or what is known as *Arabizi* (colloquial Arabic written using English letters), on every platform, whether in print, broadcast, or digital media. Attempting to analyse the reasons behind the rise of *aammiyya* (slang) language, Dr. May Zaki, a teacher of linguistics at the American University of Sharjah, argued that this shift from using Classical Arabic is linked with the Arabs' (Middle Eastern, North African, and the Gulf) recent campaign to strengthen nationalism through the promotion of *aammiyya* language, through film production, talk shows, and advertising in particular, as a new form of political identity, to distinguish between them as nations with a unique culture and political history (cited in Maher, 2015).

The use of colloquial Arabic language is fairly commonplace amongst print and broadcast journalists in the Emirates too, and with the emergence of social media platforms and tools like emojis to express feelings, Emirati journalists prefer to use *aammiyya* when posting comments or tweets. As discussed by Juma (2013), a number of pioneering Emirati intellectuals shared their views about the absence of Classical Arabic language in the local media. For instance, Ali Abu Al Reesh, an Emirati novelist and columnist for *Al Ittihad* newspaper, said that '[t]he focus on using *aammiyya* dialect in the media is a renewed call to Sykes-Picot!⁷⁸ The absence of *Fussha* or Classic Arabic language will result in further alienation and diversion between Arabs' (cited in Juma, 2013).⁷⁹

⁷⁸ A secret agreement signed in 1916. It divided the Ottoman Arab provinces outside the Arabian Peninsula into areas of British and French control and influence.

⁷⁹ The Arabic dialect differs from one region to another, even between ethnicities. For instance, there is a difference between Bedouin and sedentary speech.

Meanwhile, the Emirati female columnist Fadheela Al Muaini (cited in Juma, 2013), who writes for *Al Bayan* newspaper in Dubai has also argued that:

What is happening in the print media is nothing but a mistake, and the reason of it is the deficiency of media graduates in the use of classic Arabic. They often express in writing using *aammiyya*, without paying any attention to the different levels of knowledge and cultural background of the Arabic reading audience. There is also a deficiency among editors who no longer bother to revise and amend articles before publishing them in the newspaper. Over time, the writing and oral deficiencies have become familiar to one's eyes and ears. The dominant language now is the language of BlackBerry, and unfortunately it is used in spoken and written forms by intellectuals, who act like school children. It is distressing.

However, Nasser Al Dhaheri, an Emirati columnist for *Al Ittihad* newspaper, has argued that the 'use of *aammiyya* is often misunderstood' and that 'it should never be taken as opposed to the use of classic Arabic language in the media' (cited in Juma, 2013). On the contrary, he states 'I often use *aammiyya* when writing columns in which subject has a local peculiarity, with the aim of presenting these columns as a joke or as a form of black comedy' (Ibid.).

In a nutshell, the observations and semi-structured interviews with 40 Emirati and Arab expat journalists revealed the depth of media practise and culture in the Emirates, where freedom of expression is overwhelmed by self-censorship because of socio-political influences that force journalists to act cautiously, let alone the outdated media law that is filled with oppressive regulations that diminish the rights of protection for journalists. Nevertheless, the media is evidently developed in the Emirates for two reasons. The first is because of the generous financial support that the print and broadcast outlets receive from the government to cover employee costs, offering Emirati journalists in particular, fair benefits, career development plans, and opportunities for promotion, since HR departments adhere to the process of Emiratisation.⁸⁰ The second is because of the technological advancement that has created a diversified media environment with the emergence of digital media. Every

⁸⁰ It is a development that seeks to replace a reliance on foreign expatriate workers with UAE nationals. It is not only recruiting UAE nationals to replace expatriates; it is a major process that requires training these nationals to acquire the skills and competencies for the assigned work.

print and broadcast media outlet in the country has now developed various digital media platforms, from social media accounts to friendly websites to reach out to the local community, providing credible and up to date news stories in seconds, using attractive tools, and in the forms of photography and videography.

However, media development has also created challenges in the profession of journalism. Emirati and Arab expat journalists are isolated within their cubicles inside the newsroom, playing the role of couriers, receiving news from official channels or PR agencies and firms, rather than going out into the field to make news and interview sources directly. The content of the print and broadcast news in the Emirates is loyal, patriotic, repetitive, and promotional marketing for the government's initiatives and achievements, and lacks competition due to the absence of investigative journalism and press freedom.

5.3 Summary and Conclusion

Using empirical evidence from participant observation and in-depth interviews, this chapter examined two elements of newsroom practises that disempower women's creativity: gendered and non-gendered. From a gendered perspective, the masculine culture of the newsroom had challenged Emirati women's presence in this field as the constant prejudices of their feminine attributes and emotional intelligence stand against their professional growth and intellectual contribution, while their empowerment is often rejected due to the practise of institutionalized gender clustering in the workplace by male executives, evidencing the deficiency of HR policies on tackling women journalists' rights. The latter is acutely unnoticed nor recognized by the UAE government; affecting women journalists' presence and performance in this field as they remain unprotectively exposed to the male bullying culture inside the newsroom. The non-gendered newsroom practises, however, attested that the government demonstrates its political authority over news production, making it dominant with patriotic, protocol-driven news, and critical free. This has escalated the practise of self-censorship and the absence of investigative journalism. The government fear that their words may generate public opinion, while journalists fear the damaging consequences to their own security that is not guaranteed in the current media law of the UAE.

CHAPTER SIX

Gender, Media and Society in the Emirates

Part Two of the Participant Observation and the Semi-Structured Interviews Analysis

In the Emirates, the historical role of women in journalism was anonymous. They were rarely seen taking part in the field, in contrast to their female counterparts elsewhere. Even after the discovery of oil and the expansion of the education system, the fields of print and broadcast media have proven to be very difficult for Emirati women to enter up to this day. This is simply because the patriarchal society still views the media industry as 'unrespectable' and 'shameful' for Emirati women to pursue as an academic study and as a profession.

As explained in chapter two, any attempt by Emirati women to depart from ancient traditional practises and tribal customs remains difficult, and is still viewed by the patriarchs as problematic and against the principles of Islam. That is why Emirati women are obliged to endure segregation and veiling, which is often imposed on them due to societal pressures rather than personal choice. They are also obliged to behave properly and to appear modest in order to protect their tribe's honor and reputation. Female journalists elsewhere such as in Western and Eastern societies, including that of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), do not have to endure this distinctive gendered societal restriction, which is embedded in the tribal culture of the Arab Gulf and Emirati societies. This has made the media to be seen as a meaningful academic major and a respectful profession for women to pursue because it does not conflict with the kinship system and family background.

The complex notion of *tribal belonging*, in particular, which Arab Gulf and Emirati women submit to its suffocating rules has determined the course of their private and public life. Tribal belonging is not predominant in the MENA region societies, which had adapted to the historical waves of social change and progress in the context of postcolonial modernization and postmodern globalization. This has resulted in the fading of tribalism in its ancient form that is still practised religiously by today's societies in the Arab Gulf States and in the Emirates.

As a result, The media, in particular, is deemed inappropriate for women in the Emirates, whether as a major at university level, or as a profession. In a survey conducted for *Al Aan TV* by YouGov, nearly 20% of Emirati women have shown an interest in working in the print and broadcast media (cited in Ismail, 2011). However, nearly 30% of Emirati men who were surveyed, objected to the idea of their female relatives writing in newspapers or appearing on television due to cultural sensitivities (Ibid.) related to tribal customs, particularly *tribal belonging* as explained previously.

In this context, what does the word 'tribal belonging' encompass? Why is it viewed as a central pillar in the construction of the Emirati society that is tribal in origin? And how has tribal belonging and the quest for preserving tribal hegemony impacted women journalists in the Emirates specifically? In order to apprehend the social structure of the Emirati society and its effect on journalism practise in general, in this chapter, I will examine how gender as an identity marker intersects with other markers such as tribe, family, and class in the Emirates. I reveal the findings in which the Emirati journalists interviewed for this study conveyed their own perspective on the dominance of what Palestinian intellectual Hisham Sharabi described as 'tribal patriarchy' that has proved resistant to change (cited in Sharabi, 1988, p.50).

6.1 Impacts of Tribal Patriarchy and Belonging on Women in the UAE

As introduced in chapter two, within the Emirati society, as within many Arab Gulf States, tribal belonging is intertwined with tribal identity, which engages with aspects of kinship, hierarchy, loyalty and values, as defined by Salzman (2008), and does not refer to the lifestyle of the nomads in the desert and coastal areas (Maisel, 2014, p.102). Following in their ancestral footsteps, Emiratis, as explained by Maisel (2014), 'define their identity first by bloodlines and then geographically. The significance of bloodlines and descent is manifested in the tribal nature of the society' (Ibid., p.103). Caldwell (1978) and Kandiyoti (1988) have also provided another definition, describing this form of identity claim as the 'belt of classic patriarchy' (Moghadam, 2003). This is 'characterized by male domination, son preference, restrictive codes of behavior for women, and the association of family honor with female virtue. In the Muslim areas of patriarchal belt, veiling and sex segregation, legitimated on the basis of the Quran or [prophetic] hadith, form part of the gender system' (Moghadam, 2003, p.143).

Furthermore, this particular manifestation, which is common in the oil rich Arab Gulf societies, has resulted in creating an internal class stratification that is kinship-oriented. This class stratification is based on tribal descent and on the specific tribe's political and economic history, creating an internal social division in which Emiratis 'consider the mental divide between tribal and non-tribal groups, arguing that this man is from this lineage, my relatives belong to another lineage, and this family is not even tribal. People of different tribal background might work and live together, but they still respect the invisible line that separates them from the 'other' and regulates or limits any interaction' (Maisel, 2014, p.103).

With the sweeping social changes and the impact of external phenomena such as globalization, economic development, diversification, and the increase of the expatriate population in the Emirates (that accounts for 88.52 percent in comparison to 11.48 percent of Emirati citizens in a statistical report published by WAM (Edarabia, 2018)), the mental divide has stretched, impacting the relationship between Emirati nationals, who seek to preserve its homogeneity, and the expats, despite the seemingly harmonious coexistence. As explained by author Frauke Heard-Bey (2005), 'the fact that nationals are constantly made aware of their being [as] a minority in their own country has had the effect of bringing the national population of all the seven Emirates together to form a completely undisputed class of the privileged few. In the face of the overwhelming presence of expatriates, all the genuine "locals" perceive themselves now first and foremost as UAE citizens even though old tribal rivalries and new hierarchical discrimination continue to structure the local population internally. Despite various social strata, the local population all feel strong national solidarity, and accordingly have their very own set of behavior towards each other' (Heard-Bey, 2005, p.361). Presumably, apart from being burdened by societal restrictions, being a minority has also discouraged Emirati women, specifically, from engaging in the national workforce, according to the tenth report published by The Arab Gulf States Institute in Washington (AGSIW) in 2016. It stated that 'in 2005, 1.3 million women were living in the UAE, yet only about 300,000 women were in the workforce, at least 283,000 of whom were expatriates. National women in the workforce comprised less than 3 percent of the female population' (Young, 2016, p.12).

To this extent, Emirati women play a key role in maintaining the mental construct of kinship relations in private and in public through implementing certain tribal customs, most notably protecting the tribal's reputation and honor. This is marked by the woman's decorum and modesty, and by their practising endogamy in order to protect the lost hegemony of local people, or the native nomads in the Emirates. The practise of endogamy, in particular, has recieved orthodox approval within the Arab tribal societies, including that of the Arab Gulf States, which adopts the Maleki⁸¹ interpretation of Sunni Islam in structuring the framework of the Islamic jurisprudence in regards to marriage. As explained by Tunisian sociologist Mounira Charrad, Islamic law, especially in its Maleki version "encourages kin control of marriage ties and thus facilitates both marriages within the lineage and collectively useful outside alliance. By favoring males and kin on the male side, inheritance laws solidify ties within the extended patrilineal kin group. The message of the Maleki family law is that the conjugal unit may be short-lived, whereas the ties with the male kin may be enduring. Maleki law defines the kin group rather than the nuclear family as the significant locus of solidarity. It facilitates and reflects the maintenance of tribal communities" (Moghadam, 2003, p.122).

Such a burden, as explained in chapter two, has created inequalities because of the *limited* access to opportunities for Emirati women living under the roles of tribal patriarchalism. Even so, Emirati women of elite tribal backgrounds are in a better position and often represented in state institutions as ministers of state or as executives in social, educational, environmental, or health related organizations, thereby creating another internal societal complexity known as 'tribal exclusivity'. For example, Dr. Amal Al Qubaisi became the first Emirati female speaker of the house at the UAE's Federal National Council (FNC). Complementing her academic qualifications and expertise, Dr. Amal comes from one of the UAE's most prominent tribes, Al Qubaisi, which has a long political allegiance with the ruling family. Other examples include Emirati female ministers of state, whose surnames do not only reflect tribal prominence, but also the fact that they have enjoyed an opulent

⁸¹ Founded by Imam Malek ibn Anas (d. 759 CE), who led the traditionalist movement in Mecca and Medina, the Maleki school advocates the notion of the 'Medina consensus' as the only authoritative form of consensus and source of law achieved by relying heavily on prophetic hadiths (Cornell, 2007, p160).

upbringing, with a privileged education. This is often due to the political status of their ancestry and forefathers, who served the nation as ministers, ambassadors, or high-ranking soldiers, with the utmost loyalty shown to the monarchical system.

Tribal exclusivity in the Emirates and in the oil rich Arab Gulf States generally has been viewed as a social deficit that has resulted in discrimination because of corruption, cronyism or *Wasta*⁸², and nepotism. In view of this, tribal exclusivity, as argued by Maisel (2014), 'opposes the creation of equal citizens because only tribal members are entitled to the benefits and obliged to take the responsibilities of membership in the tribe. [Supporters of tribalism] have failed to respond to the concerns of citizens who are not members or are members of a lower tribe or naturalised citizens. In this regard, tribalism must be seen as a form of discrimination, which stands against the notion of equality among citizens in a modern nation-state' (Maisel, 2014, p.118). In this regard, social deficit caused by tribal discrimination in the Emirates was apparent in the voting process for the 2019 FNC elections, where female representation was set to fifty percent by an Emiri decree and Emirati citizens were required to elect half the candidates. However, observers of the voting process, including Emirati journalists, expressed their dismay when tribalism surfaced, pushing the political candidates' agendas for social change aside. In a column published in *Gulf Today*, a family owned Sharjah daily, Emirati female editor-in-chief Aysha Taryam wrote: 'we have witnessed time and again that people are voting according to last names instead of agendas, throwing all other electoral factors that may be of importance to the wind. This is a grave mistake, one that can systematically diminish the council's strength by rendering it into a mere popularity contest' (Taryam, 2019). Past FNC elections⁸³ have also proved that tribalism is a powerful social component in the Emirates, where Emiratis feel compelled to support members of their tribe as a sign of loyalty. In the 2011 polling stations, for instance, voters admitted that their votes were based on tribal affiliations. In an analysis of the election's results, Salem (2015) wrote: 'three of the four elected seats in Abu Dhabi went to Al Ameri tribe members. In Ras Al Khaimah, two of the three elected seats went to members of Al Teneiji family and in Ajman; two [members] of Al Shamsi tribe were elected' (Salem, 2015).

⁸² For a brief description, please see the definitions section.

⁸³ The first elections of the Federal National Council (FNC) were held in December 2006. The term of office is four years.

Nevertheless, the limited access to opportunities has become evident in the field of media, which is the focus of this research. Emirati women are underrepresented because of the dominance of tribal patriarchy, in which a 'woman's impurity is regarded as an attack on the honor of the man. In this culture, the kinship ties are so strong that the dishonorable behavior of any member of the family or tribe deeply affects all members of the tribe, and misogyny develops' (Özev, 2017, p.1013). This was evident in the following in-depth testimonials of Emirati female journalists, who recognized the importance of media in granting them a space for self-expression and a platform to voice their concerns. This was especially important for addressing women's causes, as well as in granting them some sense of autonomy, despite feeling suffocated by the misogynic rules of tribal patriarchy.

The following testimonials of Emirati female journalists will reveal the impact of tribal patriarchy on their decision-making processes. Strikingly, it will also reveal the impact of parental illiteracy on their choices regarding studying and working in the print and broadcast media. In fact, some of the Emirati female journalists interviewed for this study were raised by illiterate parents who received little or no education at all due to poverty and the lack of a schooling system before the discovery of oil⁸⁴. Some had enrolled in state-backed adult literacy and basic education programmes after the federal union occurred in 1971. In addition, the testimonials will reveal how the Emirati society perceives the media as an industry in general, and their view of the media community specifically.

For instance, when Rawdha (*Zahrat Al Khaleej*) decided to tell her parents about her ambition to become a journalist in 2002, she faced a harsh reaction from her mother. Her mother was determined that her eldest daughter majored in education to become a teacher. Her father, who died in a car crash, was illiterate, while her mother completed grade 6 and graduated from an adult literacy and basic education programme funded by the government. She remembered:

⁸⁴ Before the discovery of oil, during the last British Expedition in 1819, Emirati males and females received only modest education from Najdian scholars, who held classes in mosques. They taught mathematics, religious studies of the Quran and prophetic hadiths, as well as Arabic grammar. The first school and public library, Al Taymiyah, was established in Sharjah in 1907 (Hassan, 2011, p.124).

My father supported my decision, but was worried that I might upset the authorities if I publish news features with sensitive materials. My mother, to the contrary, was so angry at me that she demotivated me at every opportunity. She used to tell me things like: “people who join the media have a bad reputation,” and “I have raised a belly dancer!” She thought that I would remove my veil and wear indecent clothes just like those actresses she saw in black and white movies [referring to Egyptian classic movies]. I went on a food strike at home for one week!

Marriage and motherhood made Rawdha’s position as a journalist even more challenging. She added:

My husband is quite jealous because he dislikes the idea of me working in a mixed environment with strange men generally. He prefers segregation for women in the workplace, and he is not convinced about the boundaries that I draw for myself in the workplace to maintain decency and social decorum.

Meanwhile, Reem Al Breiki (*Al Ittihad*) was not only prohibited from choosing journalism as a profession, but at one point, she was forbidden to continue her undergraduate study unless she chose a major that the family approved of. Eventually she majored in history and monuments, and worked as a history and social science teacher for three years (from 1999 to 2001). However, she secretly sent columns using a pseudonym to the people’s opinions section of *Al Ittihad* newspaper to pursue her passion. She said:

I was passionate about journalism, but due to tribal and Bedouin constraints [concerning the family’s name and position in the society⁸⁵], and my mother’s disapproval of the major [journalism], I couldn’t study it. The stereotypes have changed, and we no longer follow what I call ‘the policy of shame’ or *Ayeb*⁸⁶. Mixing with men in the same workplace was considered shameful and, therefore, was completely unacceptable.

⁸⁵ Al Breiki is one of the prominent tribes in the Emirates.

⁸⁶ Arabic for ‘shame’ (العيب). In the study of superego development, it refers to the cultivation of shame rather than guilt and the enhancement of conformity and fear of others’ criticism, rather than individualism and self-criticism (Broucek, 1991, p.8).

Not only was journalism a 'no go zone' for Al Breiki, but studying at a boarding university inside the country was viewed as 'unacceptable' for female members within her tribe who expressed fears for her safety and reputation. She added:

Even choosing UAE University and deciding to live independently in a distant town, Al Ain⁸⁷, at the students' dorm was unacceptable. But local families began to accept this innovative student life after being introduced to the university's academic environment, which was backed by the state's support and the state's reassurance to local families regarding Emirati female students' safety. I am the first female member in the family to study at a university level.

Additionally, Mahra Al Jenaibi (Abu Dhabi Television Channel One) challenged her family by choosing to major in broadcast media at the UAE University. She also did this by appearing in short documentaries that she created as an undergraduate student, including *My Homeland*, which shed light on local tourism. As a result, she was awarded first prize at the Sheikh Majid Youth Media Award⁸⁸ for her outstanding talent in film broadcasting. She said:

Because of my status as a single woman, my family rejected my decision to study at a boarding university in a remote town [Al Ain] and to work in this field. But I insisted in majoring in broadcast media and in participating in almost every media related conference as an undergraduate student, defying the societal restrictions of seclusion and networking with strange men. Making personal decisions by force has eventually led my family to accept my choices.

Yaqoutah Abdulla Al Dhanhane (*Zahrat Al Khaleej*) was very emotional and outspoken about family rejection and about journalism as a career during the interview. Impressively, Al Dhanhane and her eight siblings were raised by an illiterate mother, who instilled in them the importance of education before anything else. About family rejection, though, she said:

I decided that I could not continue studying architecture [after majoring in it for three years], and registered in the college of

⁸⁷ Al Ain is an oasis town located on the eastern border with Oman. It is located approximately 160 kilometres east of the capital city of Abu Dhabi (an hour and a half drive).

⁸⁸ Launched in 2008, the award aims to employ young Emirati talents in the fields of journalism, radio, video, photography, graphic design, and broadcasting.

media without my family's knowledge. My parents didn't speak to me, they forbid that I write and get my full name printed in newspapers or magazines. They used to say: "you left architecture for what? What's the benefit of having a career in the media?"

Gradually, my mother, a grade 6 graduate, began to accept my role as a journalist. She proudly informs the neighbours each time I appear on television as a programme guest, or when my features are published in the newspaper. But my father has never changed his mind about my choice of profession to this day. I don't think he understands how meaningful and fulfilling journalism is to me.

However, for Ameena Awadh Bin Amro (*Al Ittihad*), who earned a Master's degree in media leadership, management and marketing from the Paris-Sorbonne University in Abu Dhabi, the family disapproved her choice of journalism for her profession, because they considered it risky. She said:

I began my career in 2005 as a columnist. I wrote a daily column entitled *Watar*⁸⁹ to shed light on the current regional and international political issues. For eight years, I was the only Emirati female columnist writing for the newspaper's political section. My family disapproved of my choice of journalism as an academic major to study and as a profession. From their perspective, journalism is not a respectful profession for women, which is a common stereotype, and from a political angle, journalism brings trouble. They view it as a risky profession because journalists' rights are often unprotected.

For Leila (WAM), an intern with CNN and the BBC, and who started her journalism career in 2008 writing investigative features on criminal issues released by Dubai Police for *The National* newspaper, the subject of stereotypes and restrictions are far more complicated. She said:

Women cannot get away from the fact that they are still regarded by many as second class citizens and are not considered with the same level of weight and respect given to men. I think this is mainly due to nature and nurture, so it's cultural, religious reasons and it's a subconscious discrimination by some – of course, not everyone. My dad was not very keen on me taking that path because of the stereotypes of media. My dad comes from an older generation and I think he just didn't understand

⁸⁹ An Arabic word for 'chord' or 'strain' (وتر).

very well why I would want to be writing in a newspaper back in the day.

At the end of the interview, I asked Leila if she could elaborate on her perspective about the impact of patriarchal and matriarchal approaches on subordinating women and oppressing feminism as an ideology in Emirati society. Her response was thought provoking. She said:

I don't like the word feminist because I think it has so many negative connotations, and I don't believe that to fight for women's right means we have to go against men. I'm not a man hater by any means, and I actually sympathize with men a lot! It's very difficult nowadays to be a man! In some cases, I can say because they don't know what to do with you as a woman, especially when you are empowered and educated and live in a culture which teaches them inequality.

I don't blame them [men] for being who they are. I blame the families, I blame the culture as a whole, but am not going to single out a man and say 'how dare you think this' because this is what his mom taught him, what his father taught him, what his grandparents taught him, what society taught him... the books he read, and religion to be honest as well, it's misinterpreted, and ignorance.

Meanwhile, Bashayer (a pseudonym), 27, an Emirati translation managing editor for *Al Bayan* newspaper, wanted to be financially independent; refusing to stay at home after graduating from university, simply because male members of her family, including her father, could take care of her needs. However, she did confess to me during the interview that once her social status changes after marriage, she will leave the media industry for good. She said:

Even after receiving a recent promotion, my family would prefer if I stayed home because, as they put it, I don't need a monthly payment. They worry too much about how other people within this society will judge me.

If I were married with family commitments, I would consider changing my current profession because then I would have other priorities. Not necessarily to stay at home, but I would choose a workplace that offers flexible working hours.

Mahra (*Al Azminah Al Arabiya*) did not receive support from her husband because he disapproved of her profession as a journalist. This was despite the fact that she had practised journalism at university level (in the college of journalism at Baghdad University in Iraq) before marrying him. She said:

My husband disapproved of my choice of journalism as a career due to the long working hours, whether I was working at home or at the editorial office, and due to the fact that I travelled to distant areas and abroad to do field reporting. There was a sense of guilt too, because I left my children alone at home.

Submitting to the stereotypical gender attributes for 'women', who are viewed as the family pillars and carriers of reputable social values within a patriarchal society is not unusual. This has been influencing their progress in the field of media. Fedaa Mershid, 47, an Emirati news monitor for *Al Ittihad* newspaper had to change her working routine to accommodate her husband's wishes. She no longer accepts fieldwork. Instead, she supervises the pictorial content of the society supplement, which the newspaper releases every Friday and Saturday to highlight the week's most important social events. She said:

Family commitments and restrictions imposed on me by my husband have changed my working habits somehow. I no longer go out into the field to cover social events out of respect for my husband's request. I used to work for more than eight hours inside the editorial office. I was passionate about my work.

Before working for a government funded newspaper, Yusra Adil (*Al Ittihad*) has dealt with familial criticism for appearing on Baynounah TV, a private television channel in Abu Dhabi. She hosted a social talk show directed at the Emirati youth, known as *Shababna Ghair*.⁹⁰ She said:

My grandfather, who raised me after the death of my parents, criticized me for majoring in broadcast media and considered that majoring in public relations (PR) would be more beneficial and socially appropriate for me. My family is conservative and used to criticize me for appearing on television wearing full makeup. But when I moved to work for a newspaper, they were

⁹⁰ Arabic for 'our youth is different' (شبابنا غير).

very pleased because they thought that the elite and experts read newspapers.

Heyam Obaid Bawazir, 41, who was an intern at CNN and was trained by their correspondent Jim Clancy, works today as head of news output at Abu Dhabi Television Channel One. She is the only Emirati female that I met inside the newsroom to hold such a senior position, and her colleagues have nicknamed her the 'Mother of *Oloum Al Dar*'. But before reaching this level in her career, Bawazir climbed the career ladder "step by step" as she put it, starting working for television in 1997 as a reporter, then as a correspondent. She has travelled the world. Her last mission was to Palestine, where she was supposed to produce a documentary on the 1948 Palestinian exodus, but the Israeli government did not release her entry pass, leaving her and the Abu Dhabi TV crew stranded at the Jordanian border. She recounted:

My family understood the nature of my profession, but once I became a correspondent, troubles rose to the surface. They would ask me: how can you do this? You're a girl! How will you travel alone! In the beginning, my brother escorted me [as a guardian]. My mother rejected the idea of my constant overseas tours to the extent that she didn't allow me to travel to Afghanistan.

Bawazir admitted that joining this field as an Emirati and as a female has exposed her, as well as her Emirati female counterparts, to mounting social pressures that influenced her family's perspective about the media industry. This resulted in the launch of a specific internal policy for female journalists at Abu Dhabi Media Company. She added:

I was very enthusiastic and eager to explore every aspect of journalism. As a consequence, my working hours increased and I began to leave the newsroom late at nine in the evening, which was seen as inappropriate for females at that time. Besides, commuting was difficult because I did not get my driving licence. Everyone back home was wondering what type of tasks were keeping me occupied very late at night inside the newsroom.

Familial and social pressures were far higher in Abu Dhabi at that time because patriarchy and tribalism are overemphasised in this Emirate. Because of this, the [then] minister of information and culture requested executive managers at Abu Dhabi Media Company to implement a 'working hours' plan for female

employees, under which journalistic tasks are delivered before Maghreb time [sunset]. Social pressures affected Emirati women's presence in the media. When I started my career in 1997, there were only four Emirati female journalists inside the newsroom, and because of their family objections, they resigned. One of them, a close friend, works now in Abu Dhabi Judicial Department's press office. Male colleagues and people that we met while reporting in the field used to stare at us with disapproval, they were judgmental and stereotypical.

Like Bawazir, Fatema Al Senani (Abu Dhabi Media Company), who started her career as a camerawoman for Abu Dhabi television in 2007, has encountered various challenges when entering a male-dominated field. She said:

I was not the only fresh graduate, there were three other Emirati females in the newsroom, but they resigned one year later. It is difficult being a camerawoman, not only because of the daunting working hours and the physical fatigue one feels from carrying the heavy camera equipment for more than 12 hours a day, but because it is a male dominated profession. My male colleagues would often criticize my work and question my competence. Even when I was an undergraduate student, my professor undermined my work and would often grade my filming projects with grades C and D. He told me that I would never make it as a camerawoman because of my gender, tribal background, and social restraints. To survive in this environment, I had to work harder than men to prove myself. But I admit that I was lucky enough to work with a male supervisor who saw potential in my field reports and my skills in producing television programmes and documentaries.

In the past, stereotypes existed and Emirati women who chose to work in print or broadcast media were judged for being liberal, and for breaking away from the conservative societal values. It was very difficult for the society to accept women's presence with strange men at the workplace, for long hours, and to see them break their seclusion. But today, you can notice the presence of Emirati women in the field, especially those who belong to prominent *asil* tribes such as Hessa Al Falasi⁹¹.

F.H., 34, an Emirati TV presenter for Abu Dhabi Television Channel One, faced parental disapproval to study media at university level. She did manage to receive

⁹¹ A popular Emirati presenter, who hosts a poetic contest show known locally as *Al Shara* (insignia in English). She belongs to one of Dubai's most prominent tribes.

their approval after agreeing to their terms and conditions on how to maintain social decorum inside the newsroom and on air. She said:

Even though my parents [have] studied abroad and got higher academic degrees, they were influenced by the common stereotype about the media. My parents were anxious about the negative image of celebrity TV presenters, the working environment, and the media community's reputation, which was known at that time as damaging. But I insisted on majoring in media and working as a TV presenter. I agreed to my parents' conditions: that I create a decent style for my appearance, set a good example for Emirati girls appearing on television, and only present meaningful programmes that raise awareness on issues related to the society, the youth, and health. And for the past nine years, I've been doing just that.

In this respect, the editor-in-chief of *Al Ittihad* newspaper, Mohamed Al Hammadi, an Emirati, agrees that social constraints still exist and that some families do not allow their daughters to work in the media sector. However, at Abu Dhabi Media Company, an internal strategy has been developed to empower Emirati female journalists. He said:

Women journalists receive an immense amount of support and appreciation in this field, especially married women journalists, because we understand that social constraints, usually imposed by husbands, may restrict them from going out into the field or to travel to cover news. At Abu Dhabi Media Company, we have appointed two Emirati females as editors-in-chief; one for *Majid*, a children's comic weekly magazine, and the other one for the *National Geographic Al Arabiya* monthly magazine. We have also appointed an Emirati female as an executive managing editor for *Zahrat Al Khaleej* women's weekly magazine, which means that Emirati females are taken into consideration when we develop the promotion list.

It sounds extreme to suggest that all Emirati women went through the same experiences and rejections to work in the media sector. From the 1960s to the 1980s, for instance, a few of the Emirati women who shaped the early wave of the journalism movement in the Emirates, challenged the tribal customs by choosing to study journalism in neighboring countries like Lebanon and Egypt, as the UAE University did not establish an academic journalism programme until 1977 (Simonson and Park, 2016, p.485). As a consequence, they forced public acceptance for women's presence

in media as journalists and broadcasters who appeared without a veil and wearing western clothes. Moreover, they appeared as TV guests debating various socio-cultural issues including Emirati women's empowerment and contributions to local arts and literature. Among those pioneer women is Dr. Hessa Abdullah Lootah, who wrote features on social issues in *Al Azminah Al Arabiya*⁹² weekly magazine. Another example is the Sharjah-born Mouzah Khamis, who wrote weekly columns in *Al Khaleej* newspaper and published special features on various topics, including pearl diving, herbal medicine, agriculture, and heritage, in the early 1980s. Khamis was also passionate about broadcast media and became the first Emirati female TV host, working for Dubai Channel 2 in 1973 (Salih, 1983, p.357). Hessa Al Ossaily, like Khamis, was passionate about broadcast media and had the opportunity to study Arabic literature abroad, in one of Egypt's most reputable universities: Ain Shams. In 1965, she became the first Emirati female radio host to work for Dubai's *Sout Al Sahef*⁹³ radio station. By the mid-1970s, she worked as a host for Kuwait Television, which had an office in Dubai. Later, she moved to Abu Dhabi Television, where she became the first Emirati woman to hold the position of broadcasting director (Hassan, 2011, p.21).

J.M. (WAM) is a good example of a pioneer Emirati woman journalist, who has been working in the industry for more than ten years. Born in 1965, she received a Bachelor's degree in media and public relations from Ajman University, and has been recognized for her exclusive news features that included interviews with the former ruler of Ras Al Khaimah⁹⁴ and the Crown Prince of Ajman⁹⁵. Her illiterate mother inspired her to continue studying when she almost gave up on her high school diploma. About her experience, she recalled:

I haven't faced societal restrictions. It is only my current health condition that has put some limitations on my productivity and mobility. But my husband and children have been great supporters and understood the demands of my profession as a news correspondent, particularly the overseas travel. Even when

⁹² Arabic for 'Arab times' (الأزمنة العربية).

⁹³ Arabic for 'voice of the sea coast' (صوت الساحل).

⁹⁴ Sheikh Saqr bin Mohammad Al Qasimi (1920–2010) was the former ruler of Ras Al Khaimah, a northern Emirate bordering Oman's exclave of Musandam.

⁹⁵ Sheikh Rashid bin Humaid Al Nuaimi (1984–present) is the Crown Prince of Ajman, the smallest of the seven federal Emirates in terms of area.

I was a student, my husband took great pride in my academic achievement and encouraged me to attend evening classes at the university while he took care of the children's needs in my absence.

Furthermore, the state support of the expansion of the education system, and the development of the media infrastructure in the Emirates, including the launch of media hubs that host international press agencies in Abu Dhabi and Dubai, have offered the millennial generation of Emirati women journalists with a better platform for bargaining with the patriarchs about the importance of media in supporting the state's nation-building, most notably with respect to women's empowerment. For example, Hala Al Gergawi, 35, became the youngest Emirati executive managing editor and editor-in-chief ever to be appointed in the history of *Zahrat Al Khaleej* magazine, which was founded in 1979. She has not encountered societal stereotypes or restrictions associated with her tribal belonging, has established a legal publishing house, and printed three issues of a monthly bilingual magazine entitled *Tea Before Noon*, in which she published interviews with young business entrepreneurs. She said:

I consider myself as a role model to all the female members in the family. I was the first female member to study abroad, to have her photographs published in newspapers and magazines, and to appear in televised interviews.

Moreover, Shamsa Saif Al Hanaee became the first and youngest female sports reporter for *Al Ittihad* newspaper, of which her family was proud. But she felt that social restrictions had an influence on her lack of confidence at the beginning of her reporting career. She said:

My father is proud of me, and always reads my sports features. I was very shy and unsure of myself. It wasn't easy for me to meet with sources or even ask for a short statement. But with practise, I gained confidence, built a reputation for myself as a sports reporter, and established a strong relationship with sources in the sports field.

I use journalism as a platform to champion Emirati and Arab Gulf women's sports, which I am fond of. I travel to different destinations such as Oman to cover women's sports related events. But due to pregnancy, I will not accept overseas

business missions. My husband is a great supporter and understands the demands of my work completely.

Likewise, Mona Al Hmoudi (*Al Ittihad*), who delivers lectures to Emirati female undergraduates majoring in journalism, received family support and encouragement. She said:

My family never disapproved of my decision to study and work in journalism. In fact, my eldest sister worked as a journalist for *Al Bayan* newspaper before accepting a leading position as an executive director for the communications department at the Federal National Council (FNC). My husband supports me immensely. He is very proud of my accomplishments as a journalist, and funny enough, he would even join me on the field to help with interviewing members of the public and gather data for my news features. He understands the demands of my job, especially when I am required to travel abroad. I recently travelled to Russia and Malaysia to cover governmental initiatives, and left him alone with our two-year-old son. I believe that creating a balance between family life and work is dependent entirely on the journalist.

In the meantime, Badria Al Kassar's (*Al Ittihad*) father inspired her to pursue a career in journalism. In 1999, she did her internship at *Al Khaleej* newspaper, a Sharjah daily, where she published numerous environmental features about sea pollution. Shortly afterwards, she worked for *Al Ittihad* newspaper's office in Fujairah⁹⁶. Six years later, she moved to Abu Dhabi to work in the newspaper's headquarters. About her journalistic journey, she said:

My father was an illiterate. He worked as a shipmaster and a pearl diver. He raised me up with an open mind. He taught me how to be autonomous, how to make decisions, and granted me freedom of expression inside and outside the realm of our home. He never disapproved of my choice of journalism as an academic major, to the extent that he would invite my classmates to assist them with their media writing projects in which he would chronicle tales about the sea and astrology about which he was an expert.

All in all, my family supported me and understood the demands of my career, especially the domestic travel and the overseas tours. I remember feeling terrified when I drove around the rural

⁹⁶ One of the seven Emirates, it has a coastline on the Gulf of Oman but not on the Arabian Gulf.

mountain towns of Khor Fakkan⁹⁷ like Dibba Al Fujairah and Dibba Al Hisn because of the cliff edges and constant flooding. My last oversea tour was to Jordan, where I visited the UAE's refugee camps at Mrajeeb AL Fhood area to report on the UAE Red Crescent's humanitarian efforts.

All of the above testimonials reveal one side of the story: Emirati women journalists, living in a society that glorifies the concept of 'tribal belonging' as a constituent of loyalty, and abiding by a complex kinship system in which they must protect their honor and chastity in private and in public to maintain tribal purity, or *asil*, reputation, and honor, as described by Pierre Bourdieu (1966): '[a] woman's foremost duty to self and family is to safeguard herself against all critical allusions to her sexual modesty: in dress, looks, attitudes, [and] speech... [as] shame reflects directly on parents and brothers' (Moghadam, 2003, p.119). However, when I interviewed Arab expat women journalists working in the Emirates, I realized that they have been forced to carry the burden of societal restrictions too, although somewhat differently: they have been exposed to the ideology of misogyny, which is part of the patriarchy system.

One Arab expat journalist, Lahib Abdulkhaliq (*Al Ittihad*), expressed the view that tribal patriarchalism is quite dominant in her country, Iraq, that shares borders with the Arab Gulf States⁹⁸. Her country also possesses an intangible cultural heritage that is similarly intertwined with tribal patriarchalism, impacting upon her presence in the media despite her journalistic accomplishments that started in 1979. She said:

I was the only Iraqi female war correspondent at that time. I covered The Second Battle of Al Faw⁹⁹ and the Halabja¹⁰⁰ chemical attack. My family disapproved of my work in the field of journalism, and would often mock me for working in a profession that they described as 'rubbish' just because I come from a prominent Iraqi tribe. Naturally, I like to challenge myself through

⁹⁷ Meaning the 'creek of two jaws', Khor Fakkan town belongs to the Emirate of Sharjah, but is geographically surrounded by the Emirate of Fujairah. The travel time from the town to Fujairah is 55 minutes.

⁹⁸ Negotiations were made for Iraq to join the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), but its political actions over Kuwait, followed by Saddam Hussein's invasion in August 1990, put an end to these plans.

⁹⁹ Fought on 17 April 1988, it was a major battle of the Iran–Iraq war, where the Iraqi Army, led by Saddam Hussein, conducted a 36-hour operation to clear the Iranians out of the peninsula after a two-year occupation.

¹⁰⁰ A massacre against the Kurdish people that took place on 16 March 1988, during the closing days of the Iran–Iraq war in the Kurdish city of Halabja in Southern Kurdistan.

hard effort and discipline. So, their mockery never frustrates me. Today, I give lectures to undergraduate students majoring in journalism. I often encourage them by stressing the fact that our generation has paved the way for them to be seen and to be heard.

Regarding the misogynistic ideology of patriarchy, Najat Fares Al Fares, 48, a Jordanian journalist for *Al Khaleej* newspaper, who has written more than 200 investigative features and was awarded the Arab Journalism Award¹⁰¹ for her outstanding investigative journalism experience, recalls her brothers' reaction after graduating from Al Quds University in Palestine. She said:

When my father printed a congratulatory note in a local newspaper in Palestine after my graduation, my brothers argued with him for printing the words 'my daughter, the journalist'. They didn't want me to work in this profession.

In contrast, a small group of Arab expat women journalists said during the semi-structured interviews that they did not encounter objections from their families in regards to studying and working in journalism, nor did they feel pressured by societal constraints. For example, Rasha Tubeileh (*Al Ittihad*), a Jordanian, who has been reporting on the aviation and tourism sector for the past 12 years, said:

My family has always been supportive, even when I decided to accept this job offer in 2008. They did not disapprove my decision to live abroad, let alone in the Emirates.

Likewise, Hala Al Khayyat, 39, a Jordanian journalist for *Al Ittihad*, who has a Master's degree in international relations and diplomacy, confirmed that she did not face family objection. However, balancing the career demands with family commitments has been very challenging. She said:

My father is a self-made man. He struggled to build a better life for himself since he was at the tender age of six years old. Although he is illiterate, he pushed me to study and work as a journalist, and never objected to my decision when I accepted this job offer and moved to the Emirates, against the wishes of my brothers though. My husband understands the demands of my job because he is a journalist too. But parenthood is

¹⁰¹ Founded in 1999 by the ruler of Dubai.

becoming harder now more than ever because we both tend to leave our little son behind to go out on fieldwork.

Like Hala, Jalila, a Jordanian editor at *Al Ittihad*, who worked as a reporter for *Al Hayat* newspaper in London for five years and conducted an exclusive interview with Kofi Annan¹⁰², owes her success to her father. She said:

My father inspires me. He has a moderate opinion of Islam as a religion, and believes in the necessity of women's empowerment. He has never interfered in my decisions, which may be judged negatively and stereotypically by people within Arab conservative societies. When I changed my academic major from dentistry to journalism, he supported me and continued to do so when I decided to marry a foreigner and move to live in the Emirates.

Laila Hafez, an Egyptian journalist who has been working for *Zahrat Al Khaleej* magazine for 30 years, started her career in Egypt soon after graduating from Cairo University in 1980. Recalling her professional journey, she said:

From a family perspective, I have not met any challenge. You see, my husband is also a journalist; we graduated from the same university. And because the magazine is published weekly, my work is convenient and comfortable in terms of task distributions and office hours, in contrast to my previous work at *Mayo*¹⁰³ newspaper, which was launched by The National Democratic Party in Egypt. I worked there for four years before moving to the Emirates in 1986. My husband supports me at every level. Now, he works as a media advisor for the UAE's Minister of Justice.

Alaa Abed Al Ghani, 29, a Syrian journalist for *Al Khaleej*, feels she has been blessed by having a family system that provides her with practical and emotional support. She proudly said:

Working in *Al Khaleej* was a dream come true. Since I was a little girl, I witnessed my beloved grandfather reading this newspaper from front to back cover; he had a monthly membership and would often receive copies by post to his home address in Syria at a time when the internet was not yet very popular. He is an

¹⁰² A Ghanaian diplomat who served as the seventh Secretary General of the United Nations from January 1997 to December 2006.

¹⁰³ An Arabic word for 'May' (مايو), a calendar month.

avid reader. After accepting the job offer, I broke the happy news to him first. He was very proud of the fact that his granddaughter would work for his favorite newspaper.

Of course, my husband reads everything that I write. He even posts all my features in his Facebook account. He motivated me to complete my undergraduate studies at the college of communication in the University of Damascus, even though I struggled to finish my senior year and submit the capstone project in Beirut because of the civil war in Syria. Education matters to him. He works as a banker and earned a master's degree in economics. He always motivates me by saying 'invest in your talent. I have faith in you'.

Muna Saeed Al Taher, 62, an Iraqi field reporter for *Al Roeya* newspaper, was the only interviewee who expressed to me that she did not face familial disapproval due to the stereotypes that surround the media industry. The reason for her family's disapproval, rather, was the political environment that she was living in, where the dictatorship of Iraq's president Saddam Hussein oppressed the media by imprisoning and executing journalists. She explained:

When I practised political journalism, I was 17 years old [in 1975 at Baghdad University]. At that time, a number of my relatives were imprisoned by Saddam Hussein's regime. That is why my family urged me not to take this direction, in fear of imprisonment, but I insisted on practising political journalism.

Contemplating the above in-depth testimonies of Emirati and Arab expat women journalists, it seems that bargaining with patriarchy within Arab societies generally and bargaining with tribal patriarchalism, which is a far rigid socio-cultural system in the Arab Gulf States societies specifically, remains very perplexing for these Arab women as much as for the focal Emirati women. Women journalists in the Emirates are unable to break the chains of patriarchy and its ideologies, whether based on kin ties, tribal class, or misogyny that pressure and oppress them because no independent civil society is permitted to develop in the UAE. Transforming the current internal social system and challenging the patriarchs to accept social change has become solely driven by the neotraditional leadership of the UAE that seek to achieve narrowing the gender gap through orchestrated state emancipation campaigns to sustain its political authority and image as a modern state in the international scene. This debate will be discussed at length in the next and final findings chapter, which will focus on the state's

contradictory role in empowering women while still holding them accountable for preserving 'traditions'. Sylvia Walby (1990) described this as the 'public patriarchy of the state and labor market in industrial societies' (Moghadam, 2003, p.113).

6.2 Summary and Conclusion

Using empirical evidence from participant observation and in-depth interviews, this chapter examined the impacts of tribal patriarchalism and tribal belonging on women journalists in the Emirates. With the society proving to be resistant to change and apprehensive of the top down strategies, tribal patriarchalism and belonging has put limitations on the development of a concrete women journalism movement in the Emirates as much as restrictions on their right of choice and expression, and of voicing their concern critically on gender equality to change women's social and legal rights in the Emirates.

This chapter has also explored how this has widened the divide between Emirati women of different social class, giving away exclusive opportunities for empowerment to women who belong to the elite tribe class only. The fact is these women act as role models for the state that empowers them to receive international recognition only, instead of acting as game changers to transform women's status in the Emirates. Meanwhile, intellectual middle-class women are sidelined and are often absent from the decision-making positions and from public life, taking away from them the opportunity to lobby with the political powers for social civil change in the Emirates that should start by amending women's rights in the current family law.

As a result, there is no such 'equal citizen' in the UAE because of the current dominant tribal stratification, the deficiency of the 'gender balance' strategies developed recently by the government in addressing women's rights in the Emirates and in challenging the existing gendered social practises, the lack of freedom of opinion and political diversity, and the nonexistence of feminism movements due to the deficiency of self-awareness among women in the UAE.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The State's Role in Emirati Women's Empowerment

Part Three of the Participant Observation and the Semi-Structured Interviews Analysis

For the past three decades, the neo-traditionalist leadership of the Emirates has been using women's empowerment as one of the key instruments towards nation building and branding. As author Melissa Aronczyk (2008) has described, '[n]ation branding is a particular version of national identity that allows national governments to better manage and control the image they project to the world.' (cited in Allagui and Al Najjar, 2018, p.69). Yet, even though national branding has been implemented in every institution to raise the Emirati people's awareness and sense of national loyalty, pride, and security, the leadership has made sure that it will not deviate from the core components that underpin its existence and continuation: tradition and religion.

This cultural anxiety over the erosion of religious authenticity, and of losing track of the unique Emirati history and heritage, seems to cause conflict in understanding empowerment and reinforcing it in the economic and legal spheres of this nation. According to Cattaneo and Goodman (2015), building empowerment for the individual man and woman is a continual process, in which an individual 'takes action toward personally meaningful goals; draws on community supports, skills, knowledge, and self-efficacy to move toward those goals; and observes the extent to which those actions result in progress' (Stephens and Al Nahyan, 2018, p.8). Thus, Stephens and Al Nahyan (2018) have discussed Alsop and Heinson's (2005) position on empowerment for women by stating that they need to 'understand their own self-worth, to have the right to own and/or have access to resources and opportunities, and to enjoy the freedom to make decisions about issues in all aspects of life that pertain/affect them.' (Stephens and Al Nahyan., 2018, p.8)

However, for Emirati women, this process is difficult to contemplate because of psychologically rooted familial, social, religious, and cultural restraints. Opportunities for them to progress are even harder to achieve since tribal patriarchy and the law restrict their freedom, will, and choice as individuals. For instance, married women

must obtain their guardian's (husband's) approval before starting a career, while single women must obtain their guardian's (father, paternal uncle, or eldest brother's) consent to conclude their marriage contracts. Controlling Emirati women's rights to employment, for instance, has resulted in increasing the ratio of unemployed women to men in the Emirates by 10:1, and in barring them from financial autonomy; for example, 90% of Emirati men hold bank accounts, compared with only 60% of Emirati women (Stephens and Al Nahyan, 2018, p.5).

Within this framework, the third and final findings chapter will present and explain the historical progression of Emirati women's societal role before being integrated into the Emirati state's nation building scheme. It addresses the anomalies that arise with the Emirati state's approach to empowering Emirati women while holding on to tradition in the face of rapid social change and deeming them to be the carriers of the so-called 'traditions' that those in power select and reinvent, according to their own purposes. It is of note that state-backed empowerment campaigns for education and the employment of Emirati women started soon after the country's federal union on 2 December 1971. However, they have not been fully absorbed by the resilient tribal patriarchal society in the Emirates.

7.1 Assessing Emirati Women's Condition Before 1971

During the period from the nineteenth to the early twentieth century, Trucial¹⁰⁴ women established a strong matriarchal system within society. In this system, they were in absolute control of family affairs, debt payments, investments, and business affairs at the marketplace, acting as breadwinners and child bearers, especially during the pearl diving season that extended from June to October (Sonbol, 2012, p.153).

The presence of women in society was crucial and their roles as both breadwinners and child bearers ensured the tribe's survival, since men were absent for long periods of time, risking their lives in the deep ocean. The hardship of tribal life in the desert made segregation and ancient conventional values upon both men and women very difficult to maintain, and men were strongly dependent on women at that time. The need for women's presence in commercial affairs was even raised by men, who in one

¹⁰⁴ For a brief description, please see the definitions section.

incident that occurred in Dubai's fish market in 1931, protested against the Legislative Council's decision forbidding women from selling fish alongside men. Local men argued that they spend most of their day in the boat fishing, while women were ardent in selling the daily produce at high prices, due to their convincing techniques and overall understanding of the market (Sonbol, 2012, p.154).

Trucial women also practised different professions without restriction¹⁰⁵ or seclusion, ranging from tutoring to midwifery and medicine; challenging the modern medical techniques that the American missionaries' doctors used upon their arrival in the region in 1909 with the use of traditional medicine, based on remedies used by The Prophet and the Ancient Greeks (Sonbol, 2012, p.159). One of the most prominent women physicians at that time was Hamama Obaid Al Tunaiji, known among the local people of Sharjah as *Tabibat Al Dhaid*¹⁰⁶, who during the 1940s and 1950s treated men, women, and children for various physical and psychological diseases, such as asthma, nephritic syndrome, and paranoia, using herbs that she developed out of fennel flower seeds and turmeric, or various traditional remedies that she learned from her aunt, who practised midwifery (Salem, 2014).

In spite of this, Trucial women's social conditions and their health remained problematic, due to the continuing practise of tribal traditions (which women also encouraged), such as child marriage and the use of herbal treatments alone to treat women. In her missionary reports, American physician Marian Kennedy (cited in Sonbol, 2012, p.252) wrote that child marriages were a social norm, and a girl of seven, eight, or nine would be married to an older man with the aim of producing large numbers of children (preferably male heirs) from an early age (Ibid.). This, she said, resulted in the deterioration of those young girls' health and death at an early age in childbirth, due to the deficient medical treatments that they received in the hands of local midwives, who often used rock salt as a contraceptive (Ibid.).

¹⁰⁵ Excepting the Sheiks' wives and upper-class women, who were dependent on their husbands' wealth and were concerned with charity work. However, a few upper-class women contributed to the economy by using their personal wealth (often inherited) in establishing pearl trading businesses, such as Shaikha Hussa Bint Al Murr Bin Huraiz, mother of the former Ruler of Dubai Sheikh Rashid Bin Saeed Al Maktoum (1912-1990) (Sonbol, 2012, p.164).

¹⁰⁶ Arabic for 'Doctor of Al Dhaid' (طبيبة الذيد), an oasis town in the central region of the emirate of Sharjah.

While polygamy was widespread among the ruling class and merchant families as a sign of wealth, Trucial women had to endure the act of divorce in a largely illiterate society that lacked legislation to protect divorcees. As a consequence, divorced women of the Trucial States had no choice but to struggle alone for survival. In an anthropological study aimed at documenting Emirati women's pre-oil history, author Nick Forster interviewed a 75-year-old grandmother in 2010, who said: '[w]hen my husband divorced me and went to India for trading, I had no choice but to open a small shop to provide a living for my five sons. I sold fish and clothes. In the beginning of my journey in business, I faced many difficulties, like rumours about breaking our culture norms. But soon, other women began to open their own shops and businesses' (Forster, 2017, p.40).

Nonetheless, the Trucial States' economic growth remained modest and women's low socio-economic status persisted throughout the 1930s, a period that witnessed enormous oil excavation campaigns in the area led by Iraq Petroleum Company's representative William Richard Williamson. Known to the local people as *Haji* Williamson, he was given a two-year licence to excavate oil in Abu Dhabi for 3,000 rupees (£27,000 in today's money) on 5th January 1936, followed by other western companies that arrived in the area for oil excavation, like British Petroleum (BP) and the French Petroleum Company (Total). The discovery of oil was made official years later in 1958, when French excavator Jacques Cousteau and his research team onboard the vessel 'Calypso' drilled under the sea at a depth of 8,755 feet. However, oil revenue was not put to use for national development until December 1963, when the first oil tanker left Jebel Al Dhanna Port in Abu Dhabi (Moheisen, 2015).

From the 1930s to the mid 1960s, the newfound oil wealth brought gradual advancements to Trucial society, to women in particular, who were exposed to rising Arab liberation and feminist movements, as well as to Arab literature through the modest availability of print and the establishment of schools across the region. This began with Sharjah's Al Qassemia School in 1953, followed in 1964 by six schools in Abu Dhabi, which were funded by early oil revenues, where 528 students, including 138 female students, were enrolled (Foley, 2010, p.176). Britain also contributed to the education of the Trucial people during the colonial period by establishing a number of technical schools, which offered courses in carpentry, vehicle maintenance,

electrical installation, mechanical engineering, and agriculture in Sharjah (1958), Dubai (1964) and Ras Al Khaimah (1969) (Soffan, 1980, p.51).

In addition to the introduction of schools, the modest output of the printing press led to an evolution in the mindset of the Trucial youth, who launched newspapers to criticize British interventions in local matters and call for independence, such as *Sout Al Asafeer*¹⁰⁷, which was launched in 1933 by a group of young people from Dubai and Sharjah (Ezzat, 1983, p.33).

In his memoir *The Arab of the Desert*, Lieutenant Colonel Dickson (cited in Ezzat, 1983, p.50) wrote about the influence of print and broadcast media in changing the public's view about British colonization:

In 1956, people started to listen to the radio broadcast news, which was largely aired by Egypt's radio station *Sawt Al Arab*¹⁰⁸, aiming to receive updates on the major events taking place in the Middle East, particularly the [1948] Arab-Israeli conflict in Palestine. People also began to read the analytical news reports that were published in regional Arabic and Indian newspapers.¹⁰⁹ The change of views affected our presence in the area and altered our relationship disappointingly with the Arabs in neighbouring states.

By the early 1960s, journalism had become a platform for the youth to express their views and share their political struggle against colonialism with other writers in the Arab region. For example, Salem Ali Al Owais wrote columns for *Al Shura*¹¹⁰ newspaper and his brother Ahmad for *Al Risalah*¹¹¹, while Ahmad bin Sultan wrote columns for *Al Shabab*¹¹², all of which were printed in Egypt. Also, Ahmad Amin Al Madani wrote columns for several newspapers including *Al Adab*¹¹³, which was printed in Beirut, and for *Al Qabas*¹¹⁴ and *Al Zaman*¹¹⁵, which were printed in Baghdad (Nafadi,

¹⁰⁷ Arabic for 'birds tweet' (صوت العصافير).

¹⁰⁸ Arabic for 'voice of the Arabs' (صوت العرب).

¹⁰⁹ Most of the rich merchants in the coastal side of the peninsula spoke Urdu fluently at that time due to the close economic ties with India.

¹¹⁰ Arabic for 'consultation' (الشورى).

¹¹¹ Arabic for 'message' (الرسالة).

¹¹² Arabic for 'youth' (الشباب).

¹¹³ Arabic for 'literature' (الأدب).

¹¹⁴ Arabic for 'firebrand' (القبس).

¹¹⁵ Arabic for 'times' (الزمان).

1996, p.40). The youth cultural movement and their contribution to literature disclose a hidden history of literary innovation, that young men and women of the Trucial States created, which took the forms of colloquial or Nabatean poetry, folk storytelling, and acting. Examples include the poets Mubarak Al Nakhi (1900-1982) and Salem bin Ali Al Owais (1887-1959), the novelists Shaikha Al Nakhi, who wrote *Qisat Al Raheel* (*Story of Departure*) and Abdulla Saqr, who wrote *Qoloub La Tarham* (*Merciless Hearts*) in the early sixties, and actor Ali Bu Ruhaima, who was the first Emirati theatrical actor to perform on stage at Al Qassemia School's theatre during the 1950s (Alrai, 2010).

7.2 Oil Wealth, the Emirati State and the Integration of Women

The increase of oil wealth, followed by political independence and the formation of the United Arab Emirates in December 1971 as a rentier state, comprising seven federal emirates, marked an evolutionary transition for Trucial society, women in particular, whose empowerment and emancipation became an integral part of the state's nation-building project. With the support of the nation's founding father, the late Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, and the ruling families¹¹⁶, women gained access to education and employment, and were closely involved in the national economic development plan. However, in order to convince the tribal society of the importance of women's emancipation to the development of the nation's economy, the newly born state and its 'neo-traditionalist' leadership gradually refashioned the traditional and cultural values of the society through establishing various women's empowerment campaigns and organizations under the patronage of the rulers' wives, they altered the conservative teachings of Islam that society had long observed by promoting Islamic feminism – a patriarchal vision to control women's participation, creating individuals who are viewed as social negotiators rather than decision makers. (Sonbol, 2012, p.358)

Women's literacy and education became an ultimate pillar in the nation-building project, with the goal to 'help women emerge out of seclusion and acquire knowledge about the modern world to enable them to raise their family's standard of living' (Foley,

¹¹⁶ The seven federal emirates are ruled by six families: Al Nahyan in Abu Dhabi, Al Maktoum in Dubai, Al Qassimi in Sharjah and Ras Al Khaimah, Al Nuaimi in Ajman, Al Mualla in Umm Al Qaiwain, and Al Sharqi in Fujairah.

2010, p.182). In the 1970s, the state opened and funded 350 schools, in which 94,425 students were enrolled and 7,849 teachers were registered (Soffan, 1980, p.51). The state's census report, which was published in 1975, revealed that 3,005 female students received undergraduate university degrees and made up 46% of the inaugural class at The UAE University in 1976, and more than 65% in the 1980s. By 1995, the number of female students registered at the state's first university reached 61,496. Women's literacy levels continued to rise by the decade, from 37.7% in 1970, to 59% in 1980, 70.6% in 1990 and 79.1% in 2000 (Foley, 2010, p.182).

With undergraduate and postgraduate university degrees in hand, literate women were able to join the national labour force and contribute to the development of the national economy and security. In 1977, the Ministry of Education employed 2,375 female teachers, of which 199 (8.4%) were Emiratis, as well as 551 female administrators, of which 128 (23%) were Emiratis. In addition, in 1977, the Ministry of Interior hired Emirati women in the police unit as inspectors. In Abu Dhabi, 24 female Emirati inspectors joined the police unit, while 18 female Emirati inspectors joined the police unit in Dubai (Soffan, 1980, p.74).

Nevertheless, women's education and employment were restricted because some academic degrees and professions were viewed as off-limits to them, particularly journalism. The launch of several government owned and private newspapers, as well as the inauguration of the Ministry of Information and Culture in 1975 (the National Media Council today), and the Emirates News Agency (WAM) in 1976¹¹⁷, reflected the state's agenda towards modernity and building a strong foundation for its media industry. Roles were created, legislation was passed, and modern technologies were applied to the production of print and broadcast media that is engulfed with the practise of patriotism. This has influenced Emirati women journalists' outlook on their state-backed empowerment and emancipation, which will be revealed in the observations and the in-depth testimonials in the coming passages.

¹¹⁷ According to the Central Statistical Bureau's report published in 1978, the government allocated a budget of 104 million dirhams to support media development (Ezzat, 1983, p.36).

Reflecting on her role within the state-backed empowerment campaign for Emirati female journalists, Fatema Al Senani (Abu Dhabi Media Company), who describes herself as '*Bent Al Balad*'¹¹⁸, stated:

I promote our national identity through filming projects that address patriotic causes, aiming to instill our unique heritage and legacy in the younger generation of Emiratis, and to honour our family values. Executives within government and semi-government authorities support Emirati women's emancipation project by policy making and in practise. For instance, when I enter the royal court [an exclusive all male venue to which access for women is limited] as a camerawoman to film an official event or a reception, I often stand in a special location, allocated just for me. From there I can capture conveniently exclusive moments through my lens and conduct one-to-one interviews with male members of the royal family.

Likewise, F.H., (Abu Dhabi Television Channel One) strongly believes in the impact of her role in showcasing the state's support for Emirati women, who are 'empowered more than men' as she put it. She said:

Through my live talk show, *Kaif Al Seha*¹¹⁹, I aim to change society's stereotypical views on women's rights. I aim for the world to witness the real image of Emirati women: they are not oppressed, their career choices are not limited, and they are empowered more than men, both economically and politically. Today, we owe it to the state that Emirati women have become ministers and judges. In my talk show, I interview Emirati female doctors and surgeons who specialize in complicated medical fields.

Through access to state education, Emirati women journalists, the pioneers and younger generations alike, are, as Valentine Moghadami commented 'formulating ideas about women's rights, governance, and social justice' (Moghadami, 2003, p.278). They are using the media as a platform to confirm their presence and emphasise the Emirati state's boundless support for their emancipation and participation in the nation's political and economic development. J.M. (WAM) said:

¹¹⁸ Arabic for 'daughter of the nation' (بنت البلاد).

¹¹⁹ Arabic for 'how is your health?' (كيف الصحة).

Today, Emirati women receive an endless amount of support from the government's leadership to secure their empowerment in a gender *equal* society. In this sense, Emirati women's empowerment is evident in my workplace, where my male line manager ensures that my career development is guaranteed.

The UAE labour law grants Emirati women rights, including *equal* pay and full pay when on maternity leave. But generally speaking, salaries for professionals in the media sector are lower than other sectors here, that is why media graduates tend to choose employment with media offices in government or semi-government entities, though WAM is planning to launch a new financial structure to increase payment for all employees in the agency.

In the meantime, Mahra Al Jenaibi (Abu Dhabi Television Channel One) praised the neo-traditionalist leadership of the Emirates for encouraging Emirati women journalists and for promoting their outstanding journalistic work. She said:

Our leaders support women's emancipation in the field of media. I once went out into the field with a cameraman to do a report on a local exhibition. There, I tried to get hold of Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan¹²⁰ to get an exclusive statement, but I was crammed between a dozen of male reporters. He saw the situation I was in and asked all the male reporters to give me some space, and started talking to me first before giving the rest any further statements. I also did a news report on the first Emirati female crane operator, who was working for Zayed Port. When the report was uploaded in our official Twitter account, Sheikh Abdulla bin Zayed Al Nahyan¹²¹ re-tweeted it. Note, they observe our work closely.

Al Jenaibi's testimonial leads to the fact that Emirati women working for the broadcast media in the Emirates do not feel disempowered. I observed this closely at Dubai and Abu Dhabi newsrooms. This is evident, despite the lack of access to internal corporate statistics that could have supported my debate on the glass ceiling effect in regards to Emirati newsrooms. Additionally, at Dubai newsroom, I observed the professional competition between Emirati women and men journalists, where some humorously labelled the newsroom's community as "the feminine society" because the civil labour law and the corporate's internal policy granted women more benefits than men, such

¹²⁰ Minister of Culture, Youth, and Social Development.

¹²¹ Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation.

as full pay when on leave. In fact, UAE labour law safeguard Emirati women's employment and economic rights. In 2019, an amendment to the law was enforced by the UAE's president, His Highness Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, to ensure equal access to opportunities for Emirati women and that they are not subjected to discrimination and danger in the workplace. One particular article in the amended law states that 'an employer may not discriminate against an employee based on her pregnancy' (cited in Salama, 2019). In addition, articles 29 and 32 of the labour law state that 'no women shall be employed on any job that is hazardous, arduous or physically or morally detrimental' (cited in UAE Labour Law, 2007, p.12) and that 'a female wage shall be equal to that of a male if she performs the same work' (ibid., p.12).

Furthermore, I also observed how the producers and directors of Dubai's *Akhbar Al Emarat* and Abu Dhabi's *Oloum Al Dar* news broadcast ensure they represent Emirati women to demonstrate their vital role in the national development. They would often invite successful Emirati women to appear on air as guests or conduct a short interview over the phone to address national issues. Her Excellency Dr. Rauda Al Saadi, Director General of the Executive Committee Office in Abu Dhabi, appeared on set, on day three of my observations on site in Abu Dhabi newsroom¹²², to talk about a new government initiative: a law concerning the importance of reading Arabic literature to preserve the language. In another news broadcast, which was aired on 14 February 2017, an Emirati executive guest was received at Dubai's *Akhbar Al Emarat* studio to talk about Dubai's latest initiative, the 'Hackathon of Happiness'. Her Excellency Dr. Aisha Bin Bishr, Director General of the Smart Dubai Office talked about 'Happiness Hack Dubai: Smart Travel Experience', which was launched with the aim of promoting Dubai as the happiest city in the world.

From this perspective, the neo-traditionalist leadership of the Emirates has been investing in Emirati women's education and recognizes them as equal partners in national development and the government continues to pursue a strategy of empowering women in cultural, social, and economic fields. According to the UAE Year Book 2010, the Emirates is ranked 38 in the 2009 UN Human Development

¹²² Tuesday, 14th March 2017.

Report Gender Related Development Index, among the highest ranked nations (cited in Dubai Women Establishment, 2017). The UAE Year Book contains useful information regarding women's education and their representation in government. For example, the rate of literacy among Emirati females is 91%, and the rate attending secondary and tertiary education is even higher. Not only this, but Emirati women are taking centre-stage as part of the workforce in vital sectors such as politics and the economy. In politics, Emirati women make up 22.5% of parliament, of which nine are members in the Federal National Council (FNC), while four are ministers in the cabinet representing the ministry of foreign trade, the ministry of social affairs, and two as ministers of state. There are also four Emirati women who represent the country abroad as ambassadors and one consul general. More broadly, women constitute 66% of the public sector workforce, with 30% of them holding senior positions (Ibid.).

From another perspective, Emirati male journalists during the interviews carried out for this study agreed that the Emirati state's emancipation has improved the status of Emirati women over the years. For example, Mohamed Al Hammadi (*Al Ittihad*) stated:

In the Emirates, we don't have an issue against women because we believe in their vital role as partners in the national development. Even within my family circle, women were never disregarded.

Not only did Emirati male journalists praise the Emirati state for empowering women, but they also understood the importance of their journalistic work in supporting the nation building process. Abdulla Abdulkarim (*Al Bayan*) stated:

Through my work as a journalist, I have come to the realization that I am carrying a heavy burden: supporting my nation's development and addressing the Emirati peoples' causes. Impossible, there is no such a thing! Gender inequality does not exist in the media industry or in any other industry in the Emirates. Emirati women are fully endorsed, even here at this corporation, and we [men] are jealous of that!

Arab expat journalists interviewed for this study have also expressed their admiration for the neo-traditionalist leadership of the Emirates, who work tirelessly to ensure the

advancement of Emirati women, especially in the field of media. For example, Rasha Tubeileh (*Al Ittihad*) said:

I have been living in the Emirates for the past ten years now. Times have changed and Emirati women's presence in this field has increased, erasing the negative stereotype about journalism as an unrespectful profession for women. Inside the newsroom, there is an element of professional competition between the only two Emirati female journalists reporting on economic news and myself.

Reda El Bawardy (*Al Roeya*) believes in the role of the state in granting Emirati women with 'windows of opportunities' as he put it. He said:

The governing leadership and executives at major local media corporations work hand in hand to achieve the nation-building project's number one goal that aims towards empowering Emirati women and raising the glass ceiling in the workplace. I think that women are granted with windows of opportunities, they are empowered more than men here!

Similarly, Alsayed Salama (*Al Ittihad*) shares the same point of view about the prosperous status of Emirati women. He said:

I believe that Emirati women are appreciated and receive their rights fully. The Emirati state has developed an extraordinary plan to empower Emirati women by providing them with the topmost academic opportunities, and by ensuring their emancipation at the workplace, whilst keeping in mind protecting their privacy and needs through civil law and policy making.

For Laila Hafez (*Zahrat Al Khaleej*), Emirati women owe it to the Emirati state for granting them with 'an ideal environment' as she described it, where women's rights are recognized. She said:

Emirati women are seizing every opportunity granted to them in a plate of gold, owing to the president and his wife's determination towards achieving their empowerment. They are taking the lead as ministers and hold powerful positions. Because of the political and economic development, I think that Arab Gulf and Emirati women generally live in an ideal environment that allows for their growth and empowerment in

comparison to Arab women nowadays, who are being oppressed and are literally moving backwards to the dark ages!

From a different angle, Alaa Abed Al Ghani (*Al Khaleej*) noticed how the neo-traditionalist leadership in the Emirates pays attention to the news stories published in the local media that aim to foster Emirati women's empowerment. She said:

Through my journalistic writings, I address Emirati women's achievements. Once, I conducted an interview with a very smart Emirati female undergraduate, who developed a scientific capstone project about the possibilities of establishing a space station in planet Mars. Officials at the UAE Space Agency called me soon after the news feature was published in the newspaper requesting for the Emirati female undergraduate's contact details. They adopted her innovative scientific project and offered her a job opportunity. Officials tell me all the time that my work as a journalist compliments their national duty towards the empowerment of Emirati women.

Likewise, Salam Abu Shihab (*Al Khaleej*) strongly believes that journalism mirrors the Emirati state's nation building scheme. The neo-traditionalist leadership is likewise determined to empower both genders in order to challenge the prevailing societal norms, raise awareness, and change men and women's behaviours. He stated:

There is little to complain about in this society, you know why? Because the Emirati leading government is always one step ahead of the media. The leading government takes exceptional care of the Emirati people's wellbeing and has solved almost every problem that can cross your mind. For instance, the leading government has established The Marriage Fund to support the Emirati newlyweds financially and provide them with a housing scheme too. The leading government has also developed a national scheme known as Emiratisation¹²³ to ensure that Emiratis are employed in every sector, where they receive adequate career planning with training programmes, and are granted high wages and benefits. What else can we look for or be critical of when everything is secured and well provided?

Notwithstanding, a small group of Emirati women journalists interviewed for this study affirmed to me that they feel disempowered because executives at media corporations challenge the Emirati state's investment in women empowerment by fostering gender

¹²³ For a brief description, please see the definitions section.

politics, which I observed inside the newsrooms in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. Gender politics range from gender bias and bureaucracy, to favouritism and nepotism, which are often practised by executives in terms of distributing unequal amounts of work and opportunities, as well as offering promotions and benefits unequally between men and women journalists. Yaqoutah Abdulla Al Dhanhane (*Al Bayan*) spoke of her past experience at the newspaper, where discrimination was evident and executives favoured Arab expat journalists over Emiratis, whom they viewed as a threat to their career success and development (an ongoing conflict that impacts employment in the Emirates generally). She said:

They [the management] feel apprehensive about the idea of empowering Emirati journalists and allowing them to hold senior positions within the corporation. Most of the Emiratis at that newspaper resigned due to the negative atmosphere in the workplace and the constant battle against us by the Arab expat journalists, who were scared of giving leadership positions to Emiratis! I know many classmates who majored in mass media and journalism and are still unemployed because they never had any opportunities.

But Yaqoutah spoke highly of the state's support for Emirati women journalists. She added:

The ruler of Dubai launched the Dubai Future Accelerators initiative [in 2016] to empower a new generation of Emirati media professionals. The launch came after an official visit that he made to the newspaper's headquarters. He was very disappointed when he found out that there were only two Emirati journalists working for the newspaper. After the launch of this initiative, thousands of young Emirati journalists enrolled in the first cohort and I remember there were ten of us who specialized in the field of print media. Soon afterwards, backed by the support of Dubai's ruler, Muna Busamra was appointed the editor-in-chief for *Al Bayan*, becoming the first Emirati female journalists to hold such a position in the history of Emirati journalism.

Not only gender politics but also the fixed gender views in the UAE have created a gendered media atmosphere, where Emirati and Arab expat men assess women's professional performances based on social and religious morality, which women submit to, and which impacts negatively on their self-worth and on their potential to

achieve professional excellence. While observing the newsroom activities in Dubai for two weeks, I noticed that only two Emirati women worked as field reporters there. Explaining this imbalance, one male senior editor said: “because of their nature and out of fear for their safety, we tend not to send them [females] to cover news of accidents, let alone fires or wars.”

Leila (WAM) spoke openly about Emirati women’s disempowerment caused by socio-cultural factors, yet emphasized the importance of education in altering social change. She said:

Yes, the glass ceiling is high, but it’s not just only in journalism. I think it’s across the board. I think one day we will get there. You have to remember this is a very young nation... Definitely, [the role of] education is a huge one, we are not only educating the children, but also educating their parents because parents raise these children. So, I think education starts from the household, the mother, the father, their mentality, how they teach right from wrong to their children, they teach them equality between brother and sister, teaching religion in a balanced way and not in an extreme form, that sort of thing.

Women should be strong and very confident no matter what they face, they should feel confident in their abilities and be open to growth and on developing themselves. I’m very big on supporting women, and so I feel women should always support each other. We should always champion each other, help each other through any adversity because we more than anyone would understand each other and what we are going through.

Leila’s thought-provoking testimony suggests that Emirati women, especially the middle-class educators, journalists, writers, intellectuals and employees at government and semi-government entities can transform society through political movement and activism. Their actions are similar to those of their female counterparts in Arab states such as the Palestinian activist Hanan Ashrawi and the Egyptian feminist Nawal El Saadawi (Moghadam, 2003). The Emirates has its own examples of outstanding women, who can initiate a discourse for social change. These include: Sheikha Lubna Al Qasimi, who became the first woman to hold a ministerial post in the Emirates, Dr. Hessa Abdullah Lootah, who is known locally as the first lady of mass communication for her academic contribution in teaching journalism in the Emirates during the 1980s, writer Dhabiya Khamis, and Captain Aysha Al Hameli, who became

the first Emirati woman to represent the UAE in the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). It is through the collective work of these educated women that empowerment, legal rights, and social justice can be granted as Moroccan feminist Fatima Mernissi indicated: 'it's these women, the teachers and others belonging to the petite bourgeoisie, who are in the process of changing the world around them, because their situation as it is is untenable. There are too many archaic aspects in marriage, in the relations between the sexes, in the work situation. These educated women were nourished with a desire for independence' (Moghadam, 2003, p.278).

Nevertheless, as explained in chapter six, tribal patriarchalism persists in the Emirates due to the distinctive social structure that is overburdened with stratification by tribal class that affects Emirati women's status and rights in family law. In the political realm, the neo-traditionalist leadership of the Emirates has integrated women in its nation building scheme cautiously, that is, without shaking the core of the Emirati social structure. Turkish author Deniz Kandiyoti (1988) described this as the patriarchal gender contract, in which 'the patriarchal contract is realized within the family and codified by the state. Thus, outside of the household, the source of patriarchal control is political-juridical: the state and legislation... States that legitimize their own power on patriarchal structures such as the extended family foster its perpetuation through legislation that subordinates women to the control of men' (cited in Moghadam, 2003, pp.127-130).

Among the basic rights that have been denied to Emirati women is marrying a foreign citizen (either Arab or non-Arab)¹²⁴ without obtaining prior approval from the state authorities, granting their future children with full citizenship. Emirati men can marry foreigners without prior approval. Their wives gain full citizenship rights after seven years of marriage (according to article 17 / 1972 of the law) and their children, at birth (Sputnik News Arabic, 2017). Emirati women, however, are denied such rights and may be subject to losing their citizenship as a consequence, while their husbands are not given Emirati citizenship. As for their children, they do not become Emirati citizens (taking their fathers citizenship only) until the age of 18. Only then can they contact

¹²⁴ From 2000 to 2006, Dubai courts registered marriage contracts for more than 500 Emirati women with Arab foreigners (Al Tantawi, 2007).

the authorities and the civil court to demand Emirati citizenship – a right that they may or may not be granted, depending on the court's final decision. In fact, it has been recorded that 8% of Emirati women married foreigners from 12 different Arab countries that share similarities in language, religion, and culture, with only an 11% divorce rate. This compares with 30% for Emirati men, as well as custody battles with their non-Arab spouses, who often fly back to their countries with their children seeking legal rights, so they don't lose their original citizenships (Al Tantawi, 2007).

By means of this, it is apparent that state-backed empowerment opportunities and attempts to achieve gender balance, rather than total equality, are seldom achieved because of the unconscious gender biases that Emirati men and women hold, and the belief that men and women cannot be equal because they are not identical physically or psychologically. This has affected the expectations of men and women and the evaluation of their professional performance. As author Virginia Valian (1998) (cited in Bailyn, 2016, p.164) explained:

The most important consequence of this for professional work is that men are consistently overrated, while women are underrated. Thus, professional women are at a slight disadvantage in every interaction, and these disadvantages accumulate over time to be big differences.

In the UAE constitution, the issue of women's equality is not distinctly recognized. Women's social, economic, and legal rights are not fully acknowledged due to the religious influences and the patriarchal, traditional biases that restrain and isolate them, putting them at the mercy of their male relatives who act as their guardians, and have the legal authority to prevent them from participating in the workforce. As a result, there are no national or international organizations that promote gender equality in the UAE, except for the state-backed UAE Women's Association, which is operated under the patronage of the late president's wife, Shaikha Fatima bint Mubarak (Nazir and Tomppert, 2005, p. 314). However, the UAE Women's Association works to foster conservative notions of women's maternal role and the values of family. Advocates of the social structure based on tribal patriarchalism within Emirati society blame the rise of social problems, like drug addiction and domestic violence by abusive spouses, on the state's over-employment and empowerment of women. This explains the Emirati

state's multi-faceted approach in maintaining the gender contract by maintaining public patriarchy. Under this Emirati women are subordinated within Islamic family law and their empowerment within the state's nation building scheme is shaped to ensure that they play the important role as the carriers of the so-called 'traditions'. This approach parallels that of the conservative movement in the United States of America, as explained by Rebecca Klatch, who wrote: 'the ideal society, then, is one in which individuals are integrated into a moral community, bound together by faith, by common moral values, and by obeying the dictates of the family and religion. While male and female roles are each respected and essential and complementary components of God's plan, men are the spiritual leaders and decision-makers in the family. It is women's role to support men in their position of higher authority through altruism and self-sacrifice' (cited in Moghadam, 2003, p.115).

Even though male relatives, like fathers and husbands, practise their legal authority for reasons associated with religion and tradition, in particular, the country has made considerable changes to empower Emirati women, improve their lives, and integrate them into the workforce in various sectors, including media. According to the Global Gender Gap 2014 report, compiled by the World Economic Forum, the UAE received a high ranking for increasing the literacy levels and income for Emirati women, though the ranking has dropped marginally from 109 out of 142 nations in 2013 to 115. In women's education, the UAE was ranked highly at 83 (cited in Khaishgi, 2014).

Obedience to tribal traditions and past legacies reflects honour, or *sharaf*, as Emirati people express it. *Sharaf* influences people's behaviour and outlook on life, which is apparent even today through their genuine political loyalty to the authoritarian leadership, through their commitment to preserving past tribal allegiances through intermarriages, and through their obligation towards tribal reconciliation in cases of conflict, even with the existence of a constitutional civil law.

Emirati men and women alike still obey these tribal traditions. But it is mostly women, who carry the heavy burden of tribal honour in private, lacking the freedom of choice in marriage (i.e. selecting a partner for the reason of love for example is still considered shameful); and in public, lacking the freedom of expression and choice – again – in creating their own future as independent individuals. For example, deciding to obtain

a higher degree, or a full time career, is still dealt with as a family matter, in which the guardian in the form of a father, an eldest brother, or a husband has the final say.

Education and employment have had significant impacts on three generations of Emirati women's consciousness regarding gender and their rights, as this study examined, and on their desire to achieve autonomy and to implement a social discourse for change for breaking the patriarchal gender contract. There are elements that stand in the way of Emirati women. These include the lack of confidence to achieve their potential due to being confined unconsciously with socio-cultural bias thoughts about gender roles, limited access to full participation in the nation building scheme, and the deficiency of state-backed campaigns in granting Emirati women equal rights in the family, as explained in chapter five. In order to tackle these issues, Emirati women need to comprehend the notion of citizenship because only then, as author Aziz Al Azmeh (1993) explained, 'it will complete the transition from communal to civil society, but that, like all historical processes, it is highly conflictual' due to the persistent of tribal patriarchalism in the case of the Emirates specifically and the Arab Gulf states generally (Moghadam, 2003, p.295). As a result, in the absence of activism and progressive social movements in the Emirates, it is Emirati women's fight against tribal patriarchalism that will bring about social change and eliminate discrimination. As Emirati journalist Ayesha Al Mazroui wrote: 'the fact that we have made great progress in terms of narrowing the gender gap should not lead us into complacency, thinking that the required progress has been made and that no further efforts are necessary. We might have moved beyond conscious discrimination, but we still face an unconscious bias against women' (Al Mazroui, 2014).

7.3 Summary and Conclusion

Using empirical evidence from participant observation and in-depth interviews, this chapter examined how the patriarchal contract has rendered Emirati women from achieving total autonomy and equality, conflicting with certain articles in the UAE's constitution such as articles 14 and 25 in which all persons are granted with equality, social justice, and equal opportunity, and that they are equal before the law without distinction to race or social status. Yet, Emirati women's rights are not fully recognized by the state's empowerment strategies due to the dominance of tribal patriarchalism in the society. Emirati women are particularly disadvantaged in the family law, within

the marriage and marriage dissolution, in which they may lose custody over their children as a result of remarriage for instance, confirming yet again that the nation building scheme is shaped to ensure patriarchal control within the law at the aim of sustaining the state's political authenticity. These legal deficiencies resulted in the submission of Emirati women who are viewed as social negotiators and protectors of traditions rather than autonomous decision makers. It has also disempowered their presence in the media field, as investigated earlier, because the current corporate laws foster patriarchal gender views, diminishing the glass ceiling and raising career inequality and discrimination. As a result, the current state strategies and corporate laws reinforce traditional roles for Emirati women rather than initiate any shape of equality.

CHAPTER EIGHT

Conclusion

Women's experiences of being subjected to oppression as inferiors, or as 'the other', as this study has revealed, is a universal challenge that has been influenced by the historical construct of patriarchy and the male hegemonic culture, in which their consciousness of self-worth has been affected, and their role has been often unrecorded or marginalized in stories that are defined by men.

For a long time, patriarchal ideologies have challenged women's ability to assert an identity, and have created gendered roles that women themselves have often accepted. Women's cooperation with the patriarchal system for protection has strengthened its position. As Gerda Lerner (1986, p.217) has explained:

This cooperation is secured by a variety of means: gender indoctrination, educational deprivation, the denial to women of knowledge of their history, the dividing of women, one from the other, by defining 'respectability' and 'deviance' according to women's sexual activities, by restraints and outright coercion, by discrimination in access to economic resources and political power, and by awarding class privileges to conforming women.

From this perspective, this thesis has comprehensively shown, through participant observation and interviews with journalists, that Emirati women, like women elsewhere in the East and West, have been subjected to the ideologies of a patriarchal culture, which have defined the media environment and newsroom practises that are managed by 'monopolistic heads, who are out of touch with the times and who are in collusion' (Lerner, 1986, p.200) with an authoritarian regime.

These persistent ideologies have formed stereotypical, gendered roles inside the newsroom in the Emirates. As Stephanie M. Wildman describes: '[w]hen women arrive in the workplace, the gendered expectation is that they will still perform that *caretaking* role' (Wildman, 1996, p.37). Even though the findings of this thesis reflect how versatile most Emirati and Arab expat journalists are in the newsroom, the women journalists interviewed have clearly confirmed that they are still challenged by the dominance of

a male hegemony that exposes them to sexism, and limits their access to resources, meaningful reporting, and more powerful positions in the newsroom.

Furthermore, the system of patriarchy, particularly the distinctive system of tribal patriarchalism in the Emirates, has fostered a patriotic journalistic practise, that sees women as pillars of society for two reasons. The first is biological, as they are 'responsible for the reproduction of the nation by giving birth to new citizens'; and the second is socio-cultural, as they are 'responsible for the continuation of national traditions, customs and morals' (Ekerstedt, 2014, p.4) To work in parallel with the Emirati leadership's strategy of developing a national identity, the practise of patriotic journalism, as this study has shown, has created a media environment that is free of criticism and overwhelmed by journalistic self-censorship, by Emiratis as well as Arab and foreign expats. This eliminates any attempt towards freedom of expression, free press, and the practise of serious investigative journalism in the Emirates.

And now, more than ever, with the constant political changes in neighbouring countries like Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, as well as the involvement of the Emirates' in the Yemen war and its humanitarian crisis, as well as the political boycott of Qatar, patriotism appears to clash with journalism, just as it did in America after the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre and Pentagon in 2001. Steered by the Emirati government, local media outlets and journalists have become involved in the creation of a framework of images, catchphrases, and content, which as Cherkaoui has explained, revolve around terrorism, with expressions of integrity, honour, trust, and faith, in which God is associated with the nation or state (Cherkaoui, 2017). The following testimony, written by an Emirati editor for *Khaleej Times* indicates how patriotism is influencing journalism. Using phrases like 'the evil media' and 'the malicious media outlets', Mustafa Al Zarooni wrote that: '[t]his media war between the good and evil came to maintain the national unity and the successful model the UAE is moulding, which is deemed a minaret in the region in terms of tolerance and respecting one another, and aimed to build a robust economy' (Zarooni, 2018).

With the current media environment in the Emirates, there is very little chance for change, let alone for transformation in press legislation and journalistic practise. The rationale behind the oppressive control, misuse of communication, and the silent

treatment of the press, as Emirati commentator Mishaal Al Gergawi explained, 'is to avoid feeding the issues at hand [whether political or social] with more material that would in turn be debated and shared by local and foreign tweeters, bloggers, reporters, journalists and analysts' (Al Gergawi, 2011). Most senior officials at media corporations in the Emirates belong to the old school of thought that believes 'if an issue is ignored long enough, it will be rescinded from societal memory' (Ibid.).

However, the constitutional legislation regarding the use of mainstream media in the Emirates guarantees freedom of expression, but does not directly reference the press or journalism as a private protected institution. In fact, articles 30 and 31, respectively, of the constitution of the Emirates specifically state that 'freedom of opinion and expressing it verbally, in writing, or by other means of expression shall be guaranteed within the limits of law', and that 'freedom of communication by post, telegraph, or other means of communication, and the secrecy thereof, shall be guaranteed in accordance with law' (cited in Duffy, 2014, p.27). Legal limitations on the practises of the press have been enforced by many countries and were defined by the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966) of the United Nation's High Commissioner Office for Human Rights (Ibid., p.28). Belgium, for example, has enforced legal limitations on the practises of the press for societal protection, for which they defined five specific categories: the rights of others, reputation management, national security, public order, and public health (Ibid., p.28).

Nevertheless, for the past four decades, the media environment in the Emirates has become engulfed by state-controlled propaganda, and journalists have discarded their ethical role as gatekeepers in fear of losing their jobs, imprisonment, or deportation. This particular riddle of the oppressive media environment and ignorance of the remarkable role of Emirati journalists and intellectuals over the years, was addressed by a number of Emirati journalists in social media recently. They collectively mourned the loss of pioneer Emirati journalists and authors such as Dr. Hussein Ghubash (1951 – 2020) and Thani Al Suwaidi in the social media (1966 – 2020), and blamed the patriarchal state, the government funded cultural authorities, and the multi-faceted Emirati intellectuals for ignoring their historical contribution to journalism and the literature and cultural movements in the UAE. In a series of tweets on her Twitter

account¹²⁵, Emirati journalist and novelist Dhabiya Khamis chronicled her personal journey and the cultural movement in the UAE. She tweeted: ‘the first generation of literary modernity in the Emirates was a pioneer in its rebellion, its wording and its writing, criticizing and presenting new images of life and creativity, arguing with institutions, arguing with each other, and with itself. [The first generation] has a lot of internal freedom, but paid a high price for [freedom] by absentia, prevention, confiscation, and marginalization, unlike the current generation of tamed intellectuals. In fact, we, the Emirati literary writers of the eighties and nineties, were never treated with fairness. We were marginalized, while some suffered from bitter and incomprehensible hostilities that led to their isolation, displacement, writing anxiety and imprisonment. Our books were confiscated, banning the Emirati society from accessing our literary production. I was the first Emirati writer to be detained for publishing a journalistic feature under the title ‘*The palm graveyard*’ in 1987. Unfortunately, our writers and ingenious intellectuals die without being recognized and their literary work unread by their people in the Emirates’ (Khamis, 2020).

This is not unusual within the present media landscape and collective journalistic practises of the Arab Middle East, where the Arab public’s consciousness is dominated by the fabrications of state-controlled print, broadcast, and social media platforms. This was a criticism made by Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in his last column for *The Washington Post*, before he was murdered in October 2018. Khashoggi wrote (2018) that:

Arabs are either uninformed or misinformed. They are unable to adequately address, much less publicly discuss, matters that affect the region and their day-to-day lives. A state-run narrative dominates the public psyche, and while many do not believe it, a large majority of the population falls victim to this false narrative. Sadly, this situation is unlikely to change.

Another current problem that affects the quality of journalistic practise in the Emirates and increases the authorities’ control of the press is outsourcing to communication and PR companies, to create news stories that only run in parallel with the authoritarian

¹²⁵ This series of tweets was posted on 6th July 2020 and 21 July 2020 respectively. Translated from the original source by the author.

government's policies and agendas. Government officials, as well as local media corporations, deal closely with these PR companies to develop closed-ended messages and news stories that require no further comments to the public, be it national or international, 'for fear that further developments [in socio-political news] might force them [government officials] to reverse such positions and charter new courses' (Al Gergawi, 2011).

Emirati journalists themselves perceive the heavy presence of PR companies as a substitute for journalism, as this study revealed in chapter five, which affects their practise, threatens their careers, and impacts the quality of information, with the emergence of fake news in the digital media age. In the Emirates, PR companies are trespassing on the role of mainstream media, which is now bursting with advertorials (advertisements produced as journalistic content), blurring the lines between journalism, marketing, and advertisement. Although they are funded by the government, local media outlets have succumbed to this change of practise due to financial hardships, which have led them to seek additional income through direct marketing and advertising. Commenting on this challenge, which has resulted in the loss of a clear distinction between the mainstream media and PR companies in the Emirates, Dr. Ahmed Mustafa (2018), a journalist for the Dubai-based *Gulf News*, wrote that:

Traditional media outlets started hiring PR and marketing professionals to help shape content in ways that can be monetized – especially on digital platforms. Media and PR: they need to refocus on their core businesses; PR as identity promoter and image builder, while media as a provider of credible news, information and analysis.

Not only this, but the loss of a distinction between the roles of PR companies and local mainstream media, has led to a serious ethical issue as journalists, PR professionals, and editors working for PR companies and media firms, have become accustomed to receiving expensive corporate gifts from government and private entities in exchange for positive news coverage. Even after the release of *The Code of Ethics* by the UAE Journalists' Association in 2007, that stated 'accepting valuable cash and kind gifts may cause a journalist to be biased in his coverage and is considered a breach of the code', reports of bribery, or the expectation of bribery were reported by many

journalists and PR professionals (cited in Duffy, 2014, p.26). Dr. Mohammad Kirat, Dean of the Communication Department at the University of Sharjah, revealed in a study that bribery among journalists and public relations professionals is quite common in the Emirates and the Arab Middle East. Kirat (cited in Duffy, 2012b) explained that:

Many journalists are quite noble, but in some newsrooms rampant bribery [both money and gifts] is a fiasco. The most egregious abuses occurred in the Arabic-language press. Some public relations practitioners complained that they have to play the game in order to get coverage of their product, company or event. They said that they feel powerless to change the situation.

Additionally, a number of journalists have disclosed experiences of bribery during their participation at Zayed University's Middle East Public Relations Association Conference [MEPRA] in 2012, where '[a]ttendees reported that some public practitioners gave journalists iPhones, while others presented gift vouchers worth hundreds of dirhams' (Ibid.).

But some media observers, including journalists and PR professionals, have argued that this particular practise of gifting, rather than bribery, occurs due to the culture of giving and generosity in the Middle East and in the Emirates. In particular, government and private entities might give journalists exclusive gifts and electronic gadgets in exchange for positive press coverage at exhibitions, conferences, and corporate launches, or after publishing a positive interview with executives or board members. As a media observer, Sadri Barrage, Chairman of the Middle East Public Relations Association (MEPRA), affirmed: '[i]t started as a problem with the Arab media. They used to call it "appreciation of services" if you went to cover an event. [But] things have changed a lot in the last five years in the UAE' (cited in Wrelton, 2006).

Outside the complex media landscape and newsroom culture of the Emirates, the legacy of traditional patriarchy persisted in the Middle East and tribal patriarchalism in the Arab Gulf States throughout the twentieth century and onward, after the rise of fundamentalism, or *Salafism*¹²⁶, as a political ideology in the early 1980s which saw

¹²⁶ For a brief description, please see the definitions section.

the rise of extreme Islamist beliefs, including the doctrines of Iran's Islamic revolutionist, the Grand Ayatollah Khomeini, and the Islamist movement led by the Muslim Brotherhood. These political waves encouraged the formation of Muslim Sisterhood activism across the region and introduced extreme ideologies, particularly with regard to women's affairs. These included encouraging segregation, the division of public duties based on gender, and promoting the idea that home is the best place for a woman, and that her basic role is to be honourable and produce offspring.

As a result, gender has been politicized, and the lack of a collective response by Arab women to the ongoing socio-political changes in the Middle East and Arab Gulf States, despite the fact of their state-backed education and scholarships, has negatively affected their status. In particular, this has meant the policing – or amending – of their rights in family and labour related laws, let alone in their active participation in politics. In Kuwait, for instance, insignificant issues like organizing sport classes at schools for Kuwaiti girls led to a debate inside the parliament when the Islamist member Issa Al Kandari proposed a law to limit women's participation in physical sports, including the Olympics, in respect of their nature and in accordance to Kuwait's religious principles, tradition, and social values (Al Suwailan, 2006, p.146).

Since the 1980s, in particular, fundamentalists or *Salafis* (most of them occupy significant religious positions as clerics or *mufti* in the Fatwa Department and have a prominent voice at royal courts), backed by patriarchal states such as the Emirates, have formed an identity based on religious and cultural sentiments, in which 'Muslims must return to a fixed tradition,' (Al Suwailan, 2006, p.138). In this tradition, Muslim female honour must be protected in the private sphere through her demure behaviour as a daughter, mother, and wife, and publicly through her veiled appearance, that reflects her moral virtue and purity. And ever since, the governing leadership in the Emirates, like elsewhere in the oil rich Gulf States, has been adopting this political strategy to maintain and legitimate its political power.

In the Emirates, the threat of losing the nation's hegemony and cultural identity have also led the leaders to Islamize feminism, but this did not change the structure of tribal patriarchalism. On the one hand, Emirati women have become visibly integrated in the public sphere through access to education, employment, and political practise; while

on the other hand, they have become increasingly trapped in the confines of tribal arranged marriages, which is part and parcel of tribal belonging as explained in chapter six, to maintain blood ties, some at a very young age, and trapped in roles destined for them by male relatives, because of misinterpreted religious and traditional values, with no right to choose.

Nonetheless, despite the media's power, restructuring tribal patriarchy and implementing social change are complex, and there's no simple, universal formula to follow. Emirati society, despite its constant display of unity and cohesion, is a stratified society that appraises an individual's identity based on their tribal class. This evident stratification has resulted in the exclusion of middle-class¹²⁷ Emirati men and women, in particular, influencing their presence in national development, as they are often unseen and their voices unheard.

Steering the wheel of civil social change is achievable if Emirati women of all social classes, but particularly those who belong to the largest demography of middle-class tribes in the Emirates, create a collective response. Currently, these Emirati women are functioning dynamically in the cultural and literary scenes, but their collective work is absent from the picture, alongside the absence of women's political parties and affiliations. The exception to this is the General Women's Union, which has been chaired by the former president's wife since 1975, and that promotes women's heritage and women's traditional roles in society. Additionally, Emirati women don't have a solid platform to convey their opinions on their rights, governance, and social justice in comparison with their peers in the Middle East and neighbouring Gulf States like Kuwait and Bahrain, who have succeeded in building feminist movements and in stirring debates on social change for the past four decades.

¹²⁷ Middle class Emiratis are financially secure in their employment; however, they feel inferior and socially unrecognized due to their low familial status as a result of their unknown or unimportant tribal identity. Hegemonic, strong tribal identity in the Emirates determines an individual's social status, whether male or female. For middle class Emiratis, social recognition is achieved through education and a successful career only, in comparison with upper class Emiratis, who are recognized for their prominent kinship, family wealth, allied marriages with other prominent tribes, and close ties with the monarchy that grant them exclusive positions in politics. This is the basis of the class structure in the Emirates and in Arab Gulf states, which share a similar class structure. With the absence of poverty in these oil rich states, there is no evidence of a lower class. Therefore, class is formed based on social status rather than income.

Furthermore, Emirati women of all social classes need to collectively launch domestic feminist movements and NGOs to have an influence in the national political landscape, and to increase their participation and presence in the regional and international arenas, building solidarity with their peers. Their efforts in contributing to Emirati women's press and literature, including filmmaking and the publication of books, will further shed light on their rights, and will eventually put pressure on the government to adopt new policies, which in due course, will result in progressive civil social change. As Palestinian author Hisham Sharabi states: '[the w]omen's movement is the detonator which will explode neo-patriarchal society from within. If allowed to grow and come into its own, it will become the permanent shield against patriarchal regression, the cornerstone of future modernity' (cited in Sharabi, 1988, p.154).

Finally, it is important to mention that the United Arab Emirates is in a state of transitional progress. Bargaining with the patriarchy, at the core of a conservative tribal society that has only embraced modernity and adapted to the rapidly changing conditions of contemporary life in the past 49 years, will continue to be a challenge. But the responsible attitude of the current leadership towards educating the new generation of Emiratis and investing in a knowledge-based economy for the coming decades, will surely reinforce the status of Emirati women, who are being encouraged to forge ahead in non-traditional fields, including politics and diplomatic affairs as ministers and ambassadors.

The desire to appear 'modern' is not only determined by the leadership, but is also present in the private sphere, where concepts of patriarchy seem to clash with today's highly educated, modern Emirati family, who champion Emirati women's education at home and abroad, support Emirati women's empowerment in an attempt to demonstrate loyalty to the governing leadership's wise policies, and defy old traditions, such as tribal marriages and polygamy. To the older generation and those who belong to the old school of thought, this acceptance of modernity among Emirati families can be tolerated because 'none of these customs contradicts Islamic law regarding family life' (Soffan, 2017, p.102)

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Participant Observation

Locations:

1. Dubai News Centre, operated by Dubai Media Incorporated.
2. Abu Dhabi News Centre, operated by Abu Dhabi Media Company.

Duration:

Four months, from October 2016 till January 2017, for 14 days at each news centre, excluding the weekend (Fridays and Saturdays). To conduct the observation I spent 2 hours monitoring the afternoon shift and live news broadcast at 8:00 p.m. local time.

Appendix B: Semi-Structured Interviews

The semi-structured interviews were recorded with a voice recorder and a voice recording app on my smartphone, as a backup, after obtaining the interviewees' consent.

Gender:

- 30 females.
- 10 males.

Stratification:

- Early generation (1970s – 1990s), between the ages of 30 and 60.
- New generation (2000s – onward), in their twenties.

Nationalities represented:

1. Emiratis.
2. Jordanians.
3. Moroccans.
4. Syrians.
5. Egyptians.
6. Iraqis.

Media corporations represented:

1. Abu Dhabi Television Channel One
2. Emirates News Agency (WAM)
3. *Al Ittihad* newspaper (an Abu Dhabi daily)
4. *Al Bayan* newspaper (a Dubai daily)
5. *Al Khaleej* newspaper (a Sharjah daily)
6. *Al Roeya* newspaper (an Abu Dhabi daily)
7. *Zahrat Al Khaleej* women's weekly magazine (Abu Dhabi)
8. *Al Azminah Al Arabiya* weekly magazine (Sharjah)
9. *Awraq* weekly magazine (Sharjah)

Appendix C: Full List Of Journalists Interviewed (2017)

Note: in the age column, -- is inserted instead of numbers as a few journalists did not wish to reveal their age during the interview session.

Females:

Name	Age	Job Title	Nationality
Fatema Al Senani	34	Head Of Operations Projects	Emirati
F. H. (Pseudonym)	34	TV Presenter	Emirati
J. M. (Pseudonym)	55	Reporter	Emirati
Huda Al Kubaisi	--	Reporter	Emirati
Hana Al Hamadi	45	Senior Journalist	Emirati
Mona Al Hmoudi	27	Journalist Investigation	Emirati
Badria Al Kassar	--	Journalist	Emirati
Ameena Awadh Bin Amro	38	Head of Electronic Publishing	Emirati
Mahra Al Jenaibi	28	Reporter	Emirati
Rawdha (Pseudonym)	35	Journalist	Emirati
Heyam Obaid Bawazir	41	Head of News Output	Emirati
Hala Al Gergawi	35	Executive Managing Editor & Editor in Chief	Emirati
Yaqoutah Abdulla Al Dhanhane	28	Journalist	Emirati

Leila (Pseudonym)	36	Executive News Editor	Emirati
Yusra Adil	29	Senior News Anchor & Editor External Politics	Emirati
Moza Fikri	54	Digital Media Managing Editor	Emirati
Bashayer (Pseudonym)	27	Translation Managing Editor	Emirati
Shamsa Saif Al Hanaee	29	Sports Reporter	Emirati
Reem Al Breiki	41	Senior Business Journalist	Emirati
Fedaa Mershid	47	News Monitor	Emirati
Mahra (Pseudonym)	65	Former Senior Journalist & Editor in Chief	Emirati
Rasha Tubeileh	34	Journalist	Jordanian
Hala Al Khayyat	39	Journalist	Jordanian
Jalila (Pseudonym)	--	Editor	Jordanian
Najat Fares Al Fares	48	Journalist	Jordanian
K. T. (Pseudonym)	47	Senior Journalist	Moroccan
Laila Hafez	--	Journalist	Egyptian
Lahib Abdulkhalik	60	Editor External Politics	Iraqi
Muna Saeed Al Taher	62	Field Reporter	Iraqi
Alaa Abed Al Ghani	29	Journalist	Syrian

Males:

Name	Age	Job Title	Nationality
Mohamed Al Hammadi	--	Editor in Chief	Emirati
Abdulla Abdulkarim	38	Senior Editor Economy News	Emirati
Ali Al Amoudi	60	Senior Journalist	Emirati
Dr. Hussain Abdulqader Harhara	58	Finance Managing Editor	Emirati
Salam Abu Shihab	52	Manager of Abu Dhabi Bureau	Palestinian
A. D. (Pseudonym)	38	Business Reporter	Palestinian
Yousef Bustangi	56	Business Reporter	Palestinian

Abady Mohamed Ali	60	Senior Sports Journalist	Egyptian
Reda El Bawardy	36	Senior Field Reporter	Egyptian
Alsayed Salama	51	Senior Journalist	Egyptian

Appendix D: Interview Questions

1. When did you start your career? And could you walk us through your academic background, please.
2. What are the most memorable achievements of your career?
3. Could you describe the challenges of being a journalist in the Emirates? What about the presence of PR agencies, do you find it challenging?
4. Were there any life-changing experiences in this profession that you can share with us?
5. What are the types of topics that you often discussed in the stories or features that you wrote?
6. Did you face some level of resistance in terms of content? Or were some of the stories or features that you drafted banned from publishing at some point? If so, why?
7. What are a few of the hardships you've faced from being in the public eye as a journalist, and how did you overcome them?
8. (For female journalists only): did you find it challenging being taken seriously by your male colleagues in terms of the hard-hitting, socio-economic, and political stories you wanted to cover? Were your professionalism and work judged negatively, or have you gone through physical harassment for working as a journalist?
9. Do you think that journalism as a profession is gendered?
10. Career wise, do you think that you are compensated enough for your work?
11. How would you describe journalism as a profession and a practise in the Emirates (e.g. freedom of speech, writing, and expression)?
12. Do you feel threatened by the media law (the 1980 Press and Publication Law) or the media authorities (censorship in particular)? If so, would you mind telling us a story of an experience that you've been through with the media authorities in the Emirates?

13. With the increasing debate on social media replacing journalism, do you think that it has affected the way journalists receive, gather, and distribute news? What does it mean for the future of news?
14. How do social media and other web technologies (e.g. blogs) affect newsroom operations in reporting news events? Did it change the nature of breaking news and the natural role of “the journalist”? (i.e. reporting, editing etc.)
15. What advice can you offer Emirati journalists who are looking to do the same within their own professions?
16. Can you tell us about the advice you’ve picked up on landing your dream job as a journalist?
17. Can you describe your most important mentor, and how they helped you achieve success as a journalist?

GLOSSARY

List of Abbreviations

AEJMC	Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication
AMEJA	Arab and Middle Eastern Journalists' Association
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
EWU	Emirates Writers Union
FNC	Federal National Council
GCC	Gulf Countries Council
ICCPR	International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights
MENA	Middle East North Africa
MEPRA	Middle East Public Relations Association Conference

NMC	National Media Council
PR	Public Relations
UAE	United Arab Emirates
WAM	Emirates News Agency

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