

TRADING CULTURE: HAVE WESTERN-EDUCATED EMIRATI FEMALES GONE WESTERN?

Maher Khelifa^a,

Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, College of Arts and Sciences,
Zayed University, Dubai, United Arab Emirates (UAE).

^aCorresponding author: maher.khelifa@zu.ac.ae

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Abstract: The United Arab Emirates' large Western expatriate workforce as well as the economic and global pressure for the use of English in education and the workplace have created a high demand for Western and Western-modeled schools and universities around the country. A large number of English-speaking schools and universities are currently available and cater equally for expatriate and Emirati students. Some universities and colleges adopting Western curricula are even fully funded by the government as in the case of Zayed University. Unlike their parents, many Emirati youth now follow Western curricula delivered in English by Western and Western-educated faculty, and are therefore heavily exposed to Western thought, ideals, values, and behaviors. The purpose of the study was to explore cultural changes in Emirati Muslim female university students as a result of their exposure to Western culture as they pursue their undergraduate education in a Western-modeled university in the United Arab Emirates. Findings showed that females are still anchored to their Arab-Islamic culture yet increasingly show a strong interest in Western lifestyles and English language use. Females' shifts toward Westernization included alterations to traditional behaviors, attitudes, and an increased Western value orientation.

Keywords: Cultural alienation, Cultural identity change, Emirati Muslim female undergraduate university students, Western curricula, Western-modeled undergraduate university education.

I. INTRODUCTION

From 1920 until 1971, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) was under British rule and was known then as the Trucial Oman, Trucial Oman Sheikdoms [15] and the Trucial States [11]. Following independence in 1971, the UAE focused its energy on nation-building including the set up of key institutions of the state. From the start, the country leaders placed a high priority on education

[1] and invested heavily in building the country's human capital to meet the needs of the state for a skilled and qualified workforce [22]. Nowadays, the country's interest and commitment to secure high quality education to all Emirati citizens remains very strong and is very evident in the country's current policies and strategic directions.

In the early stages of nation-building, the assertion of Arab and Islamic identity was central to the young state and an aim for the UAE national higher education [8]. The country's early curricula valorized the Arabic language and the Islamic character of the state. However, the initial support for an Arab national identity through a traditional education model has gradually diminished [22] and in the last couple of decades, the country has abandoned the Egyptian-influenced education system followed from the time of independence and has instead imported Western curricula in view of building the country's human capacity to compete in a global environment.

As a result of the recent educational reforms, many Emirati youth, unlike their parents' generation, now follow Western curricula delivered in English by Western and Western-educated faculty, and are consequently heavily exposed to Western thought, ideals, values, and behaviors. The purpose of the study was therefore to explore cultural changes in Emirati Muslim female university students as a result of their exposure to Western culture as they pursue their undergraduate education in a Western-modeled university in the UAE. The study explored the impact of a Western curriculum, as a standard of education, on Emirati students cultural identity. It specifically focused on how Western education affects female students' perception of self and the family, perception of personal autonomy and independence, especially in relation to decision-making, appreciation of the local culture, and value orientation. Furthermore, the study investigated students' attitude towards the use of Western curriculums and examined whether students experience cultural alienation as a result of their

Western education.

II. STUDY CONTEXT: A BRIEF BACKGROUND

A. Education in the UAE: A Brief Historical Overview

Compared to Western standards, the UAE educational system is relatively recent. At the turn of the 20th century, other than few religious schools known to indigenous people as “*Katatib*” [15] no formal education system was in place in the region [3]. The religious schools delivered traditional education known as “*Mutawa’a System*” which was based on individual efforts of the religious teachers to help students memorize the Holy *Quran*, the *Hadith*, and learn the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic [15].

Between 1900 and 1938, several new schools were established throughout the Trucial Oman by wealthy pearl merchants who were influenced by the Arabian Reform [15], [6]. While the *Katatib* were rooms in the teacher’s house where the students sat on the floor and learned just *Quran*, *Hadith* and other basics, the schools established by pearl merchants offered a wider curriculum and classes were held in real school buildings with classrooms equipped with tables and chairs [15]. These schools offered a curriculum that included literature, *Fiqh* (Islamic Law), *Tafsir* (Interpretation of the Quran), Mathematics, and calligraphy. Most of these schools closed down after 1939 following a decline in the pearling sector and the defeat of the Arabian Reform Movement.

In the 1950s, the pearl merchants’ early drive for education development formed the essential blueprint for the renewed education initiatives undertaken by the rulers of the Sheikdom themselves [3]. The education initiatives of this period grew concurrently with the intensification of Arab Nationalism and anti-colonial sentiments in the region [15]. During the 1950s and 1960s, the Trucial Oman were negotiating their liberation from colonial rule, and with this desire came the need for social and cultural affirmation by emphasizing the Arab Nationalism and Islamic identity, most notably in the curriculum.

Following unification of the Trucial Oman and the creation of the UAE, the federal government assumed full responsibilities over all educational matters [2]. In 1972, laws were enacted making education compulsory at the primary level and free for UAE citizens at all levels. The late Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the first president of the UAE, placed a high emphasis on education and soon after the union, he rented out old houses which he turned into schools and recruited teachers from Egypt, Palestine, Jordan, Syria and other Arab countries to teach Emirati students [1], [15]. In 1976, the UAE

opened its first University in Al-Ain, Abu Dhabi. Between 1976 and 2010, the relatively small country counts more than 20 public and private universities and colleges spread around the seven Emirates.

Despite the UAE government continued emphasis on Islamic identity and the strong support for education, the Arab-based education system that had hitherto been used did not produce the desired development in human capital and failed to build the country’s human capacity to meet the new demands introduced by globalization and the diversification of the local economy. And while at the start, the UAE nation-state identity was a central aim for the UAE national higher education [8], the new global pressures and the country’s quest for modernization and human capital development have rallied in favor of the introduction of Western models of higher education downplaying the Egyptian-influenced earlier curricula. The remarkable proliferation of Western-based Higher education institutions in the UAE between 1985 and the present reflects the country’s openness and a socio-economic transition towards a globally-oriented economy.

The recent efforts to reform the UAE higher education system seem to have emanated from a conviction that education and development go hand in hand [9], [26], and that university training should be relevant to national manpower planning and institutional development [24]. A chief policy priority was then to train Emiratis for positions of leadership and other areas of workforce needs [19]. Consequently, for quality assurance reasons, the reformation of the UAE higher education system relied solely on the reproduction of Western models and the expertise of Western academics [22].

B. The Study Institution, the Students, and Faculty: A Brief Synopsis

Zayed University (ZU) is a young higher education institution founded in 1998 in the United Arab Emirates. Currently, ZU has four campuses; two in Dubai and two in Abu Dhabi. All campuses are managed by a single administration and offer similar programs. For the first 10 years, ZU comprised two campuses and was strictly dedicated to the education of Emirati females. Lately, the university has opened its doors to female students of all nationalities and to Emirati males. Nevertheless, gender separation continues to be the norm on all of these campuses.

Unlike many other universities in the Gulf, the institution is distinctive for being the only university in the region receiving American accreditation. Other features that distinguish the University include the exclusive recruitment of Western or Western-educated faculty. ZU is also distinctive for its student-

centered mission, its outcome-based learning environment, its emphasis on technology in teaching and learning, and its intent to provide an American-like education to Arab students. Further, the instruction is delivered strictly in English with the exception of few courses of Arabic and Islamic studies. The language of instruction is therefore English within the context of an Arab culture and society.

In line with local cultural rules of gender segregation, the university caters separately for national female and male students. Nearly all students in the female only campuses wear the *abaya*, or black cloak, and the *shayla*, or headscarf. A small number of students wear the *niqab*, or the face veil.

Teachers at ZU are mostly Westerners or have received a Western education. The country of education includes the United States of America, Australia, Canada, the UK, New-Zealand. Faculty educated in Arab countries are hired as part of the Arabic and Islamic Studies program. Western or Western-educated faculty frequently have Western world views and come to teach with a Western set of values and ideals.

C. The Problem

In the last couple of decades, Western curricula have come to replace the hitherto used Arab-based curricula in most public UAE universities which exclusively cater for UAE nationals. The reform of higher education seems to be part of the country's general discourse grounded in regional and global competition. Hence, the reforms appear to be dictated by economic restructuring emanating from the country's strong desire to play a key regional and global role [17]. The new expectations from education aim at nation-building and producing competitive graduates ready to take on leadership positions in a diversified and increasingly global economy. Universities across the country have therefore switched to English as the language of instruction progressively downplaying the use of Arabic in the classroom [14]. Mazawi [24] noted that the GCC higher education systems are now structurally synchronized with their US counterparts, in terms of accreditation and curricula. He also noted that part of the higher education reform process, Arab universities lost their position as major socializers and suppliers of faculty members to the Gulf countries from the late 1980s onward [24].

While the UAE recent educational reforms seem to properly fulfill the country's goals for a well-developed human capital, on a social level, the current situation reflects the tensions between nationals aspiration to modernity through the

adoption of successful Western models, and the desire to resist the sweeping global forces which are alarmingly changing the face of the country and the nation's cultural fabric. As social changes became more noticeable, especially in young male and female behaviors and attitudes, questions were being raised about the effects of using English as a medium of instruction on student's culture and identity. Local reactions to educational reforms have especially been linked to concerns about protecting indigenous Emirati culture. Many locals have expressed worries about the cultural menace posed by Western influences and view the recent curricular reform as a form of neo-colonial threat to the UAE cultural identity [8]. The content of Western curricula, as believed by many locals, trains students to think and behave like Westerners, thus alienating Emiratis from their own language and cultural heritage. Therefore, this study sought to explore cultural changes in Emirati Muslim female university students as a result of their exposure to Western culture as they pursue their undergraduate education in a Western-modeled university in the United Arab Emirates.

III. METHODS

A. Design

This study followed an exploratory descriptive research design using a survey instrument specifically prepared for the study. The purpose of the study was to explore cultural changes in Emirati Muslim female university students as a result of their exposure to Western culture as they pursue their undergraduate education in a Western-modeled public university in the United Arab Emirates.

B. Participants

Participants of this study were recruited from the population of baccalaureate students of Zayed University, Dubai female only Campus. A total of 103 Emirati female students volunteered to complete an online survey.

C. Instrument

The data-collection instrument used in this study was a self-administered online survey written in English. The survey was developed specifically for the study and was validated using a panel of experts and a pilot study using a sample of 45 students from the target population. Other than demographic information, the survey included four sets of questions with varying formats including closed-ended, open-ended, Visual and Likert scale items. The first set of questions pertained to the curriculum and included questions in relation to student experiences with the Western curriculum implemented at Zayed University. The focus was on how the students perceived the

curriculum as a moderator of Westernization and cultural identity change. The second set of questions explored participants' perception of self and the family environment in relation to traditionalism and modernism, and the perceived nature of family relationships. Other questions focused on females' future plans in relation to education, friendships, work, marriage, and childrearing. The intent was to tap into females' perceived autonomy and independence in decision-making in relation to the aforementioned important personal matters. The third set of questions examined participants' acceptance of their cultural values and traditions, dress code, and language use preferences. The last set of questions examined participants' value orientation, specifically whether respondents' still hold an Arab/Islamic value orientation or are becoming Western-oriented.

D.Procedure

Baccalaureate female students were contacted using the internal email network and were requested to complete an online survey. The package included a cover letter, a consent form, and the survey. The covering letter included a brief description of the study and an ample discussion of participants' rights. Participants were requested to volunteer for the study and were assured of anonymity, confidentiality of information and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

E.Data Analysis

The collected data was analyzed using quantitative and qualitative methods. Quantitative data were analyzed at the descriptive and inferential levels. All quantitative data analyses were performed using the Predictive Analysis Software Statistics (PASW version 17.0), and qualitative open-ended questions were analyzed using common themes and grounded theory.

IV.RESULTS

Participants of this study were recruited from the population of baccalaureate students of Zayed University. One hundred and three students volunteered for this study and completed an online survey. Participants were on average 20 years old (\underline{M} = 19.95, \underline{SD} = 2.31) and mostly never married (92%). In relation to parents' education, results showed that the majority of the respondents' parents were educated (90% of fathers and 87% of mothers).

The study explored cultural identity changes in Emirati Muslim female university students as a result of their education in a Western-modeled university in the UAE. The study specifically focused on students' exposure to the Western culture embedded in the Western-based curriculum followed at Zayed

University and how this exposure is changing various elements of their cultural identity.

Students were first asked to comment on whether the curriculum was perceived to promote Arab and Islamic values or Western values and ideals. Using a five-point visual scale, with 1 being "strongly disagree" and 5 being "strongly agree", students were asked give their opinion about what the curriculum was perceived to emphasize and promote. Results for this query are summarized in Table 1.

TABLE I
STUDENT PERCEIVED CURRICULAR EMPHASIS

Statements	Mean	SD
The curriculum promotes Arab and Islamic values	2.83	1.34
The curriculum promotes Western values	3.48	1.22
The curriculum promotes Arab and Islamic identity	2.88	1.64
The curriculum promotes Western identity	3.80	1.28
The curriculum is favorable to the UAE culture	2.90	1.46
The curriculum is favorable to Western culture	4.07	1.62
The curriculum raises awareness about the UAE history	2.67	1.30
The curriculum raises awareness about western history	4.01	1.03
The curriculum develops my fluency in English	4.16	1.05
The curriculum develops my fluency in Arabic	2.50	1.28

Using the same 5-point visual scale as above, students were next asked to retrospectively reflect on whether their exposure to a Western-based curriculum has changed their thought patterns, language use, and behavior. They were also asked to reflect on whether their Western education is detaching them from their indigenous culture. Results for this inquiry are provided in Table 2.

their family environment in terms of traditionalism and modernism. Results are provided in Table 4.

TABLE II
EFFECTS OF EXPOSURE TO CURRICULUM

Statements	Mean	SD
Because of my exposure to a Western curriculum, I now think like a Westerner	2.83	1.34
Because of my exposure to a Western curriculum, I now behave like a Westerner	3.48	1.22
Because of my exposure to a Western curriculum, I am being detached from my native Arabic language	4.11	1.07
Because of my exposure to a Western curriculum, I am being detached from my native culture	3.67	.93

The study also investigated whether female students in the sample experienced any cultural alienation and identity crisis as a result of their exposure to a Western education. Using a 5-point visual scale, with 1 being "not at all" and 5 being "very much so", participants were asked to rate the statements included in Table 3.

TABLE III
STUDENTS' PERCEIVED CULTURAL ALIENATION

Statements	Mean	SD
My culture is my way of life	4.31	1.64
I am confused about my cultural identity	2.20	2.05
In my daily life, I am torn between cultures	2.87	2.03
I am a comfortable mix of cultures	3.48	1.79

The study's next focus was on potential areas of personal and social changes. The queries examined how locally delivered Western education affects female students' perception of self and the family, perception of personal autonomy and independence, especially in relation to decision-making, appreciation of the local culture, and value orientation. Participants were first asked to comment on how they perceive themselves, their parents, and

TABLE IV
PERCEPTION OF THE SELF & THE FAMILY ENVIRONMENT

Statements	Very Traditional	Traditional	In Between	Modern	Very Modern
Self	0%	4%	33%	49%	17%
Father	4%	16%	44%	33%	4%
Mother	2%	28%	36%	30%	5%
Family	0%	3%	39%	48%	5%

Although not directly related to curricular effects, participants were asked to comment on the nature of their relationships with family members including their father, mother and brothers. This was meant to gather information about the nature of the students' family environment. Results showed that these relationships are no longer traditional with only 11% of participants reporting traditional relationships with their father, and a lower percentage reporting traditional relationships with their mother (6%) and brothers (2%) respectively.

Respondents were asked about their plans in relation to education, marriage, and child-rearing. These questions explored respondents' independent decision-making, and shed light on their perceived priorities and the primacy of these matters in their life. Results for this question are summarized in Table 5.

TABLE V
STUDENTS' PLANS FOR EDUCATION, MARRIAGE & CHILDREARING

Questions	Percent
<i>Education & Marriage</i>	
I am already married and going to school	7
I will probably get married while still in school	15
I intend to finish my education then get married	51
I plan to get started in my career then get married	27

Education & Childrearing

I already have a baby or babies	4
I will probably have babies while I am still in school	6
I plan to have babies after I finish my education	52
I intend to get started in my career then have babies	38

Participants were also asked questions pertaining to their perceived autonomy and independence in decision-making in relation to friendships, work, and marriage. Results are reported in Table 6.

TABLE VI

STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF DECISION-MAKING

Questions	Strongly Agree	Agree	Mod. Agree	Disagree	Str. Disagree
I decide whom I befriend	0%	42%	26%	4%	28%
I decide when I see my friends	5%	27%	22%	30%	16%
I decide where I will work	0%	42%	26%	4%	28%
It is my decision to work with men	14%	26%	34%	17%	9%
I decide whom I marry	22%	25%	24%	20%	10%
In general I decide for myself	28%	40%	22%	8%	2%

Respondents were further asked about their dress preference when they go out. Ninety-one percent still prefer to wear the traditional *Shayla* and *Abaya*, 3% like to wear the *Shayla* without the *Abaya*, 2% favor to wear the *Abaya* without a *Shayla*, and 4% like to go out without the *Shayla* and the *Abaya*. In addition, participants were asked about the language they prefer to use at home and with friends, and their appreciation for their culture. Participants' responses are presented in Table 7.

TABLE VII

STUDENTS' TRADITIONAL VERSUS NON-TRADITIONAL ORIENTATION

Questions	Str. Agree	Agree	Mod.	Disagree	Str. Disagree
I like to speak English more than Arabic with my friends	11%	5%	18%	18%	47%
I like to speak Arabic more than English with my family	54%	29%	9%	6%	2%
I do not like my culture	4%	4%	15%	28%	48%
I do not like Emirati values	3%	2%	16%	34%	44%
I value my traditions	40%	41%	17%	1%	1%

Furthermore, this study explored female students' value orientation. Participants were asked to give their opinions about a number of values that typically highlight either adherence to or departure from Arabic and Islamic values (see Table 8). Some of the statements emphasizing Islamic value orientation explored concepts such as religiosity, altruism, helping others, honesty, forgiveness, and elderly respect. Although other religions and cultures do emphasize similar values, the chosen items characterizing an Islamic value orientation are consistent with the traditions of Arab and Islamic societies and are thus very entrenched in the collective consciousness of Arabs. In fact they are so part of the traditional Arab culture that departures from those expected norms signal major departures from expected social behaviors. Items highlighting Western values included constructs such as individuality, freedom, independence and individual self-determination, and assertiveness. These items are characteristic of Western thought and behavioral patterns and are usually emphasized in Western theory, society, and school curricular. Because of a tendency toward collectivism and altruism, a typical traditional Arab and Muslim is not expected to be individualistic, free to act independently without putting the welfare of others before one's own. Participants' answers to each statement used a Likert Scale format with 1 being a "Very bad thing to do", 2 "Bad thing to do", 3 "Fairly bad thing to do", 4 "Fairly good thing to do", 5 "Good thing to do", and 6 being "Very good

thing to do". The mean Islamic value orientation was higher ($M = 5.09$, $SD = .05$) than the Western value orientation ($M = 4.01$, $SD = .80$). Tests of within subjects effects were very significant $F(1) = 126.78$, $p = .00$, suggesting that respondents' values are still anchored in Islamic principles of the local culture. Participants' responses to the Western value charged items suggested however that those values are gaining strength especially those that relate to autonomy and independence. Results are reported in Table 8.

TABLE VIII

ISLAMIC VERSUS WESTERN VALUE ORIENTATION

Value Orientation	Statement	Mean	SD
Islamic	Always telling the truth even though it may hurt you or others	4.30	1.26
Islamic	Never cheating or having anything to do with cheating situations	5.13	1.40
Islamic	Living your religion in your daily life	5.73	.76
Islamic	Stopping and helping a person who needs help	5.66	.77
Islamic	Being sincerely concerned about the problems of others	4.69	1.04
Islamic	Giving someone money even if it is your last dirham	5.06	1.14
Islamic	Respecting the viewpoints of older people even when they are different from yours	5.28	.82
Islamic	Forgiving others when they harm you	4.94	1.23
Western	Looking out for yourself and not others	3.01	1.59
Western	Being outspoken and honest in expressing your likes and dislikes, even if it hurts someone's feelings	3.28	1.50
Western	Being independent from other people	5.15	1.17
Western	Demanding freedom and independence above everything else	3.99	1.39
Western	Going your own way in spite of what others think	4.15	1.38

Western Wanting to be your own boss 4.62 1.30

$F(1) = 126.78$, $p = .001$

V. DISCUSSION

This study explored cultural changes in Emirati Muslim female university students as a result of their exposure to Western culture as they pursue their undergraduate education in a Western-modeled university in the UAE. The study explored the impact of a Western curriculum, as a standard of education, on Emirati students' cultural identity and examined whether students experience cultural alienation as a result of their Western education.

In general, findings suggest that students think that the curriculum puts a higher emphasis on promoting Western values, Western identity, and the English language. They do not think that the curriculum affirms their Arab and Islamic identity or develops their Arabic language skills but rather grounds them firmly in Western culture and thought. Although students in the sample do not strongly believe that their thought patterns are now that of Westerners, they increasingly behave like Westerners and feel they are being detached from their native language and culture as a direct result of their exposure to a Western curriculum. One participant noted "it [the curriculum] does affect students' culture and identity. Most of the girls act like Westerners, and you see that from the way they dress, talk, think, and behave". Another student said "because people start thinking that they have to learn and speak English all the time, they start neglecting their mother tongue. They don't just talk in English, but they also act as Westerners!" Another student had also this to say: "Yes, if you learn everything in English then everything you read is in English and your ideas are not influenced by Arabic and Islamic ideas anymore".

However, based on the results, they do not seem confused about their cultural identity and continue to lead a life entrenched in their culture despite what might seem on the surface to be a departure from culture and tradition. They are not torn between cultures and feel they are a comfortable mix of many cultures. One student noted "we usually practice them [traditional cultural expressions] among ourselves. In particular, we do only express them in our environment, among people that are used to them. But when we are with non-locals, we normally adopt others' behavior to be somehow similar to them. That make us feel more comfortable". Another student said "We keep up with modernity but hold on to our originality. For example we keep wearing our *abaya* but we use new decorations and different styles. The

point here is whether we added new things or not we are still wearing the *abaya* and *shayla*". However, the current generation of tertiary students seem to grapple with a considerable amount of cultural conflict even though they process this with openness and tolerance. One student noted "we are accepting, not everything but somehow we are overwhelmed. When me as a student cannot speak Arabic fluently and feel I am losing the words but I remember them in English, does this mean a threat to my identity?"

Results also suggested that the majority of the young women who took part in this study perceive themselves as modern. These findings are in contrast with the traditional lives of the Bedouin females of the not so distant past. Taken alone, this result testifies to the magnitude of cultural metamorphosis. From traditional women and subservient homemakers, UAE women have witnessed drastic changes to their social role and status. Local women are now visible everywhere and contribute significantly to the development of their country [10]. The thrust for this dramatic transformation toward modernity is intimately tied to the government's strong emphasis on female education [4]. Inkeles and Smith [12] have early on highlighted the strength of the association between education and modernity suggesting that schools, and especially higher education, may be influential in encouraging greater modernity. Women in this study are undergraduate students in a Western-modeled institution where they are constantly exposed to Western views and ideas that embody and encourage modernity [21]. In addition, these women live in an increasingly Westernized social environment leaving them with no choice but to be modern.

Participants in this study have clearly attested that their family environment has moved markedly toward modernity. Fernea and Fernea [7] suggested that Families in the Arab world appear to be becoming more and more like modern American families. Transactions in UAE families seem not to be negotiated any longer within a traditional and rigid framework but rather within an open and supple environment. Russell, Wadi, Khelifa, and Jendli [20] observed similar patterns of change to family relationships in the UAE. This change seems to also characterize mother-daughter interactions even though Emirati mothers are traditionally expected to assume the role of the guardian of family traditions [4]. They are expected to hold the fort and ensure that their daughters abide by and act within the cultural limits. This is perhaps why almost one third of the participants still view their mothers as having a traditional outlook. Education seems to have been a major catalyst of cultural changes in the UAE.

Indeed, the drastic changes toward modernity within the family environment seem to have been made possible by increased education opportunities for parents and children. Most participants in the sample have indeed indicated that their parents are educated.

The future plans reported by participants in relation to education, marriage and childrearing reflect a drastic shift from the generally accepted Arab female perspective on these issues. A homemaker is what most Arab females wanted to be in the very near past [13]. A female wanted to marry her dream husband, have children and devote her life to her family. To the contrary, most females in this sample wanted to finish their education first, get married and later have babies. Many others wanted to settle a career first before even considering marriage or childrearing. These results echo the findings of Russell, Coughlin, El Walily, and Al Amri [19] which suggest that Emirati adolescents are increasingly career-oriented than family-focused. These thought patterns have a Western flavor to them and suggest an underpinning philosophy of individualism and independence. In many Western societies, females are increasingly delaying childrearing for career reasons [29]. These educated women now go to school no questions asked. So delaying marriage and childrearing may also suggest that these women may increasingly find it difficult to let go fast of this new-found freedom.

Just a decade ago, these women would have not been able to express similar thought patterns as those expressed in this study. After all, in the not so distant past, they may not have been asked to express their views to begin with. Presently, females appear to be more centered on their education and on career advancement than their mothers and grandmothers. Western education is without a doubt one of the main factors promoting this change in female culture [21]. Nowadays women are getting educated and are graduating from Western-based colleges and universities. Increasingly, females are more exposed to outside influences and ideas, and many female university graduates seek to gain even more independence than the past not-so-educated cohorts. This is clearly one of the areas generating enormous social conflicts especially in males.

Nowadays, education exposed the new generation of women to how things are done in Western countries. They see their social role as different from their not-so-educated counterparts. As results suggest, female students believe that they have a say in mate-selection and are likely to postpone marriage and childbearing to after graduation, and in many cases to after starting a career. This is because in Muslim societies pregnancy follows soon after marriage creating extra challenges for women to stay at work or to balance

between work and family. Therefore these women currently expect their family to be supple and to allow them to continue their education and influence in mate selection including turning down a particular family choice [20].

Results suggest that, for these women, marriage may not be as important as it used to be. This is because women feel empowered by their education and are becoming more independent as they work and earn their own income. In the past, females were expected to get married at the age of puberty [13], [28]. This was a “normal” process because most females get married at that age. Marriage was favored because it raises females’ social status especially if she gets pregnant [28]. Presently, Emirati women want to get married at a much older age [19], [20] which sometimes clashes with parents’ plans for their daughters resulting in parents-daughter conflicts.

Emirati women also delay marriage for other reasons including wanting to marry the right man. Uneven gains in education for women and men, with most men dropping-out early from school to join the army or the police [20], have created another host of difficulties. Currently, women do not want to get married to men who have lower levels of education and income [5]. In Arab societies, men are traditionally socialized to lead the family. A reduced financial power of the “head” of the household produces tensions in the family as males’ authority, traditionally embodied in their ability to provide for their family is seriously jeopardized [18]. Recently, men also fear that women take over their traditional leadership roles and therefore find it difficult to accept getting married to local women with a higher education level and income.

Findings in general suggest that Emirati female students have achieved major gains in relation to their perceived autonomy and independence in decision-making about friendships, work and marriage. Emirati females of this study mostly believe that it is up to them to make personal decisions about personal issues. A couple of decades ago, however, these issues were not at all considered personal matters for females. Statements as such may very well be considered improper or sacrilegious. By default, these type of decision were out of the question for females and were strictly a realm of prominent males in the family. More recently, however, Emirati women have seen considerable social gains because of their educational attainment, and are now perceived as an important and integral part of UAE society. Gains in women rights have included the right for an education, more freedom in the area of decision-making where in the past few decades women were told what to do with no right to discuss or question

male-made decisions. Nowadays, women can make their own decisions although this is still usually done in close consultation with important family members. Women have changed from being the quiet and passive part of society, to being more active and demanding to be equal to men.

Parents’ education and openness played a major role in supporting the modernization of these women. Educated parents are indeed more open to outside ideas and the changes that can benefit their daughters. Parents now encourage their daughters to adapt to new ideas, but within the limitations of religion. To the contrary, uneducated parents, who are progressively becoming a minority in the country, continue to have a traditional stance and do not accept these modern changes. This type of parents often have more control over what their daughters do, including dress code, work and marriage decisions, and even the major their daughters choose. In short, they decide what they think is suitable for their daughters. The author recalls many discussions with several advisees who indicated that their parents are behind their choice of major.

This study further examined whether Emirati female university students are holding on to their culture in light of their exposure to a Western education. Findings of this study in general indicated no major cultural shifts. Most participants pointed out that they still prefer to wear the *shayla* and *abaya* and to speak Arabic with friends and with family members. They have a strong appreciation for their culture and still treasure their traditions and values. However, based on the author’s observation of the social and cultural evolution of the UAE for the past ten years, results pertaining to dress norm and language use seem questionable and do not reflect the current state of affairs. It is suspected that social desirability largely accounts for these particular research outcomes. From personal observations, however, the author believes that a great deal of cultural changes have taken place in relation to dress norm and language use.

In relation to women dress norm, women are stepping out of their traditional clothes, and are adopting Western fashion. Nowadays, it is mostly known that young females wear fashionable Western clothes underneath the traditional *Abaya*. Many let their *shayla* fall and let show parts of their hair. A small number of students have given up their *shayla* and completely uncovered their hair. A new trend has also emerged where most females wear their *abaya* open to let show their fashionable and designer clothes. Further, a minority of women have already taken a step away from the cultural limits and have taken-off the *shayla* and *abaya* leaving behind forever two major religious and cultural symbols for Arab and

Muslim females. The on-campus use of strong make-up, noticeable perfumes, colored contact lenses, expensive designer eye-wear and jewelry has also become the norm for local females.

In relation to language use, although not promoted by the curriculum, participants believe that they continue to hold on to their language in daily conversations with friends or family. Arabic language use indeed continues to be prevalent at home because many parents and grandparents may not speak English. However, it is easy to note that whether within the study university or elsewhere in the community, young women increasingly speak English amongst their peers. Sometimes they speak "Arabizi"; a slang term for a form of speech that mixes Arabic with English. The dominance of the English language in the business of everyday life of the UAE is very evident forcing locals to learn and use the English language. The fact that Arabic is losing ground as the main language of everyday life in the UAE is an illustration of identity formation conflict. This is especially the case as language structures cultural realities [23], and the ways individuals experience the world and interact with it [16]. Arabic is intimately tied up with the Muslim faith and the Arab culture and traditions. The increased use of English and disuse of Arabic have caused major local concern [14] with many linguists calling for innovative approaches to teaching Arabic to make it more appealing to Arab youth. The UNESCO has echoed similar concerns with other world languages that are currently at risk due to the global use of English [27].

The study also showed that most participants have a strong attachment and appreciation for their culture, traditions and values. Results showed that the majority of respondents continue to stick to Islamic values such as religiosity, altruism and help of others, forgiveness, honesty, charity, and elder respect. Participants' were, at the same time, high on individuality, independence and autonomy; indicating an increased appreciation for these core Western values. Many participants were also high on assertiveness; a much valued and emphasized quality in the Western world. These results are somewhat similar to Saudi females' experiences as described by Yamani [30], and to Iranian women struggle between modernity and traditions as depicted by Sullivan [25]. These results highlight the complexities of Emirati females' identity development struggle. They emit an interest in Western values and lifestyles and at the same time place a lot of emphasis on their culture and religion. They would like to hold-on to their culture but are increasingly lured to tempting modern lifestyles. Contrary to what has been reported by participants, and based on prevailing student behavior

seen on campus, it seems that the present cohort of Emirati female students are torn between the longstanding family traditions and the country's new and pervasive modus vivendi. Currently, young Emirati female students face constant lifestyle contradictions generating enormous cultural conflicts. While one foot rests in a Western environment, the other is firmly anchored in the country's traditional culture [20]. Many young Emiratis are lately grappling with psychological problems and stress, with many engaging in juvenile delinquency and unorthodox behaviors.

Despite a growing identity conflict, the results suggest that, in general, Islamic values seem not greatly affected by a Western education. Young Emirati female students are still preserving religious beliefs and other core values representative of the Arab-Islamic Emirati culture. They are, however, picking up some Western values such as independence, autonomy, freedom, and assertiveness which do not clash with Islamic beliefs but decidedly signal a major change in culture of the country and a departure from traditional norms.

VI. CONCLUSION

In summary, the young women in this study are students in a Western-modeled university who continue to struggle between attractive values from the West and Arab and Islamic culture that run deep in their collective conscience. So far, they seem to have navigated West without veering much from core Arab and Islamic values. Their choice of Western values seem to have undergone a careful sift as many of the newly acquired values do not clash with Islam or the local mores. Though difficult to achieve, they seem to have succeeded for now to balance modernity with tradition and embraced open-mindedness and the willingness to venture in hitherto unexplored areas. Thus far, they have crossed milestones in rights in comparison to earlier generations and are getting a chance to play larger roles in the advancement of their society. Their achievements no doubt reflect the modern and liberal approach of the UAE leadership, and the will of the government to put all of its human resources at work.

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