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UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

CULTURAL FIELD GUIDE

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Foreword

The United Arab Emirates Cultural Field Guide is designed to provide deploying military personnel an overview of UAE's cultural terrain. In this field guide, UAE's cultural history has been synopsized to capture the more significant aspects of the country's cultural environment, with emphasis on factors having the greatest potential to impact operations.

The field guide presents background information to show the UAE mind-set through its history, language, and religion. It also contains practical sections on lifestyle, customs and habits. For those seeking more extensive information, MCI A produces a series of cultural intelligence studies on UAE that explore the dynamics of UAE culture at a deeper level.

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CULTURAL FIELD GUIDE: THE UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) is a federation of seven emirates located on the Arabian Peninsula. It borders the Arabian Gulf to the north and northwest, Oman and the Indian Ocean to the east, Saudi Arabia to the west and southwest, and Qatar to the northwest. It encompasses total of 83,600 square kilometers (32,378 square miles), making it roughly the size of Maine. Although much of the UAE is desert, it does have significant geographic variation including the Sabkha sandy flats along the coastline and the Hajar Mountains in the eastern peninsula. UAE's climate is among the hottest and driest in the world, though the mountains receive limited rainfall.

Statistics

- Total population (2007): 4,348,000
- Non-national population: 511,864
- Gross national income per capita (2006): \$31,190
- Life expectancy at birth m/f (2003): 79
- Urban population percentage (2007): 77
- Adult literacy rate: 90 percent

EMIRATES

An emirate is a political territory ruled by a tribal leader, or sheikh. Emirates vary in size and power. The largest and most powerful emirate, Abu Dhabi, encompasses 87 percent of UAE's total land area and controls approximately 87 percent of the country's oil reserves. The smallest emirate, Ajman, has a land area of only 264 square kilometers (102 square miles) and has no proven oil



Nick Taylor

Desert in UAE

resources. Despite the variations between emirates, each retains its autonomy. This has contributed to the success of the union, which is often described more as a confederation than a federation. UAE's seven emirates and population (2003 estimates) for each are as follows:

- | | |
|------------------|-----------|
| ■ Abu Dhabi | 1,591,000 |
| ■ Dubai | 1,204,000 |
| ■ Sharjah | 636,000 |
| ■ Ajman | 235,000 |
| ■ Ras al-Khaimah | 195,000 |
| ■ Umm al-Qaiwain | 62,000 |
| ■ Fujairah | 118,000 |

The UAE is home to approximately 10 percent of the world's proven oil reserves and has a wealth of natural resources. The oil reserves and natural resources have transformed UAE from a poverty-stricken country to one of the world's most developed. Its population has grown drastically, from a few hundred thousand in 1967, to approximately 4.4 million today. Much of this growth is due to an influx of foreigners, who comprise nearly 80 percent of the total population and 90 percent of the workforce. Most of the indigenous population is Sunni, Arab, and tribal. Islam and tribalism remain the most significant social and political influences in the UAE. However, the population faces serious challenges of self-definition, due to the large number of foreigners that reside in the country.

Emirate-level identity and organization are significant to most UAE citizens and social, historical, and economic differences between the seven emirates are pronounced.

Abu Dhabi

Abu Dhabi is the largest and richest emirate and as such has had the most significant role in the history and development of the federation. Its massive oil revenues have allowed it to generously fund development in the poorer emirates and to provide the bulk of financial support to UAE's federal government.

Much of Abu Dhabi is desert, although the emirate does have a coastline. The capital of Abu Dhabi, also called Abu Dhabi, is on an island less than 250 meters (820 feet) from the mainland. It is connected to the mainland by the Maqta and Mussafah bridges and is the largest city in Abu Dhabi. It is also the capital of the UAE. Al-Ain lies along the Oman's border and is the second largest city. The Liwa oases, a string of nearly 60 oases in the interior desert,



Abu Dhabi Skyline

are also significant population centers. Much of Abu Dhabi's native population is tribal in heritage and many of these tribes have a semi-nomadic past. Abu Dhabi is dominated by the Bani Yas tribe, which includes the ruler's family, the al-Nahyan. Although the al-Nahyan have ruled Abu Dhabi since the 18th century, they have maintained strong alliances with other leading tribes in order to support their authority. These desert and tribal traditions remain strong in Abu Dhabi and influence the emirate's social organization and governance.

Oil was discovered in Abu Dhabi in 1962; however, it was not until in the later 1960s that oil production became a transformational force. Prior to the discovery and production of oil, Abu Dhabi was very poor and underdeveloped. Oil-fueled development has been more pronounced in Abu Dhabi than any other emirate in the UAE and has brought an atmosphere of leisure and wealth to its people.

Dubai

Dubai was founded in 1833 when a breakaway section of the Bani Yas tribe moved from Abu Dhabi and resettled in the coastal vil-

lage of Dubai. Since then, Dubai has cultivated an image as leading international commercial center. Centuries of foreign visitors have brought extensive cosmopolitan influence to the emirate. A key port linking Asia, Africa, and Europe, Dubai is the most diverse of the emirates and has the most open society.

Dubai is known for its fast-paced atmosphere. Although its limited oil reserves have assisted its development, oil has not driven Dubai's economy as it has in neighboring Abu Dhabi. Instead, Dubai's rapid modernization has been driven by trade, construction, tourism, and real estate, all augmented by oil revenue.

Dubai is traditionally home to a more tribally homogeneous native population than Abu Dhabi and the ruler's tribe has significant authority in the emirate. Merchants have historically been



Sheikh Zayed Road, Dubai

the biggest challenge to Dubai's political system and have often demanded more authority in decision making.

Sharjah

Sharjah borders Dubai; together the two emirates comprise one extended contiguous urban center. It has a coastline on both the Arabian Gulf and the Indian Ocean. Sharjah possesses limited oil and natural gas reserves compared to Abu Dhabi, but have sufficient supplies allowing the emirate to be economically self-sufficient. A branch of the Qawasim tribe rules Sharjah; Ras al-Khaimah is ruled by another branch of the tribe. The Qawasim were a dominant maritime power in the 18th and early 19th centuries. The British defeated the Qawasim in 1833 and their power has continued to decline.

Sharjanis consider their emirate to be the cultural center of the UAE. They are more educated than their fellow Emiratis and Sharjah is home to a large number of universities, many of which are branches of foreign institutions. In addition to its oil and gas supplies, Sharjah is home to small industries and has successfully promoted its tourist industry.

Ras al-Khaimah

Ras al-Khaimah is the northernmost emirate and contains the Hajar Mountains. Ras al-Khaimah was the seat of the Qawasim maritime power in the 18th and early 19th centuries. Its destruction by the British in 1820 marked the fall of Qawasim dominance in the lower Gulf. Ras al-Khaimah gradually gained its independence from Sharjah and in 1921 the British recognized it as an autonomous emirate. It is proud of its past, strongly protective of its independence, and has often sought to limit the UAE federal government's scope. It delayed joining the federation for 6 months hoping

oil reserves would be discovered in its borders, which would give it a better bargaining position to acquire more authority within the federation. There was also concern and anger due to the prominent positions of Abu Dhabi and Dubai in the federation. Today, Ras al-Khaimah continues to limit the growth of federal institutions, which it considers an intrusion of Abu Dhabi and Dubai in its internal affairs. Despite the desire for autonomy, Ras al-Khaimah has little ability to support itself economically and depends on revenue from the federal government. However, it does have some industry and arable land that supports small-scale agriculture.

Ajman

Ajman has the smallest area of all the emirates. It is bordered to the north, south, and east by Sharjah and the Arabian Gulf to the west. Ajman is a tribally homogenous emirate ruled by the Al Bu Khayraban section of the al-Na'im tribe. Ajman has undergone significant development in recent years, particularly in real estate and has benefitted from its close proximity to Dubai and Sharjah.

Umm al-Qaiwain

Umm al-Qaiwain is the least populated emirate, with only 62,000 residents in 2003. It is also the poorest of the emirates. It is tribally homogenous and ruled by the al-Ali tribe. It has experienced a leadership transition, as its long-serving ruler, Rashid bin Ahmad Al Mu'alla, died in January 2009 and his son, Sheikh Saud bin Rashid assumed leadership of the emirate.

Fujairah

Fujairah is the only emirate in the UAE that does not lie along the Arabian Gulf and instead borders only the Indian Ocean. Like Ras al-Khaimah, it is mountainous. Throughout much of its history, Fu-

jairah was isolated from the settlements on the Gulf and fostered connections with the neighboring Omanis. It is dominated by the al-Sharqiyyan tribe, the second largest tribe in the UAE (following the Bani Yas). Originally part of Sharjah, Fujairah was recognized as an independent state by the British in 1952 as a result of its tribal unity and dislike of Sharjah rule. Fujairah has a very busy port and is also an increasingly popular tourist destination.

CULTURAL NARRATIVES

The UAE has existed for centuries as a society of traditional sheikhdoms with established political, economic, and social traditions. By the 18th century, the two most influential forces in the UAE, Islam and tribalism, had solidified within the region. Islam came to the region in the 7th century and continued to grow in prominence, so that nearly every Emirati was a Muslim. Another significant cultural influence was the region's tribal structures, which dominated its economic, political, and social institutions. The two most influential tribal confederations, the Bani Yas and the Qawasim, settled in the area and came to dominate both the internal desert regions and the outlying coastal areas.

In Arab societies, a tribe is a group of people descended from the same grandfather. Every tribe consists of many thousands of members, and is divided into a number of branches. The tribe, however, is not only an embodiment of social harmony, it is also a form of political organization.

Emiratis believe that the Bani Yas migrated to the region from Yemen through Oman. The most powerful branch of the tribe, the Al Bu Falah, achieved dominance through its control of vital water resources and its alliances with other branches of the Bani Yas. Abu Dhabi's ruling family, the Al-Nahyan, is part of the Al Bu Falah

branch. Another significant Bani Yas branch is the Au Bu Falasa, which includes the al-Maktoum family, the Dubai's ruling family.

The Bani Yas domain was in Abu Dhabi's desert, particularly in the Liwa oases. However, in 1761, the Bani Yas discovered a freshwater source on Abu Dhabi and many relocated to the coastal region. Although many Bani Yas branches were semi-nomadic pastoralists, after this discovery many also took to the sea as fishermen or pearlers.

The main rival of the Bani Yas were the Qawasim, a tribal confederation in present-day Ras al-Khaimah and Sharjah. The Qawasim origins are controversial and it is believed that they migrated to the region during the 14th through 18th centuries, either from central Arabia or the coast. Their livelihood was the sea and by the early 19th century they came to dominate the lower Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz, demanding tribute from all passing ships.

Qawasim demands for tribute in the Gulf angered the British, who had a growing maritime presence in the region, which was a key stopover on their route to India. They deemed the Qawasim "pirates" and in 1805 launched an aggressive naval campaign against them. The region became known by the British as the "Pirate Coast." In 1820, the British destroyed Ras al-Khaimah and defeated the Qawasim. Qawasim rulers signed a truce with the British, agreeing to abstain from piracy in exchange for access to British ports. Other tribal leaders followed suit and signed similar agreements with the British.

British Rule

After signing a series of agreements with Emirati tribal leaders, the British pursued a policy of indirect rule in the region. Despite their limited presence the British strengthened the posi-

tions of the rulers they recognized. British recognition gave these sheikhs an external source of legitimacy and often an additional support source when dealing with internal or external challenges. The British polices dealt primarily with maritime matters, which weakened the seafaring Qawasim's authority. This allowed the Bani Yas, who maintained a strong support base in the hinterland, to rise in power.

Over the course of the 19th century, the British gradually increased their influence in the region. In 1853, local Sheikhs signed the Perpetual Maritime Truce with the British. The Sheikhs agreed to permanently abstain from maritime aggression in exchange for access to British ports. This treaty largely reinforced itself, as access to British ports brought the sheikhs significant economic benefits. Following the 1853 treaty, the region became known as



Fahiri Fort

the Trucial Coast. In 1892, the local sheikhs signed the Exclusive Agreements, which granted the British sole control over the region's foreign policy and defense.

Over the 19th and early 20th centuries internal power struggles were common as the British elevated the authority of certain leading local sheikhs over others. Sheikhs often ruled from coastal towns and posted their relatives as representatives in outlying regions. At times, these local rulers, known as *wali*, gained significant authority and challenged the ruler or demanded the recognition of their independence. The make-up of the seven sheikdoms that comprise UAE today did not come about until 1952. Prior to that time, the number of recognized sheikdoms fluctuated based on local power structures and British needs.

One fluctuation that had a lasting impact on Emirati society was the migration of the al-Maktoum family (of the Al Bu Falasa branch of the Bani Yas) to Dubai from Abu Dhabi in 1833. Two leading members of the al-Maktoum family resettled in Dubai along with approximately 800 other individuals, doubling the coastal village's population. Located between the territory of the Bani Yas and the Qawasim, the al-Maktoum relied on British recognition to maintain their independence. The al-Maktoum also relied heavily on commerce and trade as they lacked significant ties with the desert economy. They attracted many foreign traders and merchants through a highly unregulated economy. These traditions continue in Dubai, whose continued lack of restrictions and free-flowing financial and commercial sectors often bring accusations of illegal activity.

Pearling Industry

Dubai led the region's growth of the pearling industry, which over the late 19th and early 20th centuries became the region's most significant economic pursuit. Prior to the pearl industry, most of the region practiced subsistence herding and small-scale agriculture. By 1900, more than 1,200 pearling boats sailed from the Trucial Coast. Many pearlery were local tribesmen, although a large number of foreigners and slaves worked in pearling as well. Pearling brought relative wealth to the region and much of the population settled in coastal villages. Even tribesmen in the desert depended on revenues from pearling and many traveled to the coast during pearling season. Wealthier tribesmen often owned boats, employing poorer tribesmen and slaves to carry out the often dangerous work of diving. As the pearling season only lasted half a year, many pearlery took loans from their boat captain, indebting themselves to the captain until the next season and creating a cycle of debt and dependency.

The pearling industry also attracted large numbers of foreigners, particularly Persians and Indians, which settled in the Trucial Coast. Dubai attracted many foreigners and became a major port on the Gulf for ships passing through to South Asia, Africa, and Europe. Dubai grew in prominence in 1903, when the port of Lingah on the eastern Gulf coast declined due to increased trade restrictions by the Persian government. This made many Persian merchants resettle in Dubai. Both Arab and Persian merchants held significant authority in Emirati society. They often enjoyed greater wealth than the ruler, whose only source of wealth was often customs duties and import taxes.

While the merchants derived their wealth from many sources, including pearling, trading, and shipping, the ruler depended en-



Dubai Rotana Hotel

tirely on taxes imposed on the pearling fleets and on revenues provided by the custom houses to provide income for himself and the state treasury.

Early 20th Century

The prosperity of the early 1900s came to an abrupt halt in the 1930s when the Great Depression, coupled with the rising cultivated pearling industry in Japan, crippled UAE's pearling industry. Prior to this economic collapse, more than 30 percent of the population had been involved in pearling. With the region's economic base destroyed, merchants began to leave and the poverty level began to rise.

However, during this same period the British increased their presence in the region, as they searched for oil and landing bases for

*Yesterday these Emirates were torn apart
In them destructive men created havoc.
And today we are enjoying security and stability
Forcing envious people to admire us.
Yesterday these were disunited emirates
Suffering ignorance, poverty, illness, and chronic disease,
And today the Lord has bestowed upon us his grace
In unaccountable abundance.
Yesterday, few people knew our name
And today, our voice reaches all corners of the Earth.
Oh; What a difference between our yesterday and today.*

~Poem by Hamad Bin Shihab, "Poetry in the UAE"

their new air fleet. They paid local sheikhs concessions for landing strips and oil exploration rights. These funds offered some relief from the economic woes caused by the downturn in pearling and marked the first time that the sheikhs had an independent source of wealth. The formerly politically active merchant elite were sidelined, as rulers no longer depended on their support. This upset many in the Emirati community, as evidenced by the Dubai reform movement in 1938. Fearing a loss of influence in the sheikdom, local merchants, including relatives of the ruler, banded together to demand representation. Although the ruler of Dubai agreed to form a consultation council, or *majlis*, he disbanded it 6 months later. Its demise demonstrated the diminished authority of the once-powerful merchant elite.

Although oil exploration and air landing rights brought some revenue to the region, it did little to compensate for the devastation caused by the collapse of the pearling industry. The British, following their policy of indirect rule, invested little money in improving the internal conditions of the region. Although Dubai fared better than other emirates due to its continued significance

as a regional trading hub, the poverty of the Trucial Coast was so stark that in the 1950s entire families moved to neighboring Qatar.

Oil was discovered in Abu Dhabi in 1962. Although production began soon thereafter, it took many years for a transformative change to occur. This was due in part to the reluctance of Abu Dhabi's ruler at the time, Sheikh Skaikhbut, to utilize oil revenues for social change. Sheikh Shaikhbut was reluctant to transform Abu Dhabi society and imposed restrictions on new construction and development. This was unpopular with most Abu Dhabians, who were falling behind many of their neighbors in social development. At this time power in Abu Dhabi was decentralized, and Shaikhbut's brother, Zayed, had amassed considerable authority as the governor of al-Ain. Offering a vision of progress and change, Zayed eventually sidelined his brother and became the ruling sheikh of Abu Dhabi.

Oil wealth greatly changed UAE's economy, political systems, and society. Massive development was undertaken and the standard of living rose precipitously through employment in the public sector and extensive social services. Many Emiratis were not trained for the demands of the new workforce and foreigners flocked into the emirates to fill the often high-paying jobs. The old economic industries collapsed as Emiratis pursued wage employment and resettled in urban areas. Urbanization increased as most Emiratis moved toward coastal cities. UAE's landscape was transformed by modern highways connecting every corner of the emirates and skyscrapers that replaced mud and palm houses.

Oil wealth first affected Abu Dhabi, but increasingly affected the other emirates as unification efforts began. Beginning in the 1950s, Britain took a more active role in fostering unity among the emirates. The British established the Trucial States Development



Zayed Mosque is Indicative of UAE's Oil Wealth.

Office to coordinate development in the emirates. In 1968, Britain shocked the Gulf by announcing that they would withdrawal from the region in the next few years. Their small size and threat from Iran and Saudi Arabia, both of which desired to increase their influence in the region, prompted the emirates to consider a unified government.

The initial federation was formed when Sheikh Zayed of Abu Dhabi met Sheikh Rashid of Dubai and the two decided



Hallway in Zayed Mosque

that their emirates would be united in a federation. The other emirates were invited to join, and in 1971 the United Arab Emirates became an independent state. Initially the UAE was composed of six emirates; Ras al-Khaimah did not join until 1972, making the UAE the federation of seven emirates that it is today.

Since the UAE's foundation, emirate rights have been of the utmost importance. Each emirate has a strong local identity and fights to retain control of its economic and political affairs. However, Sheikh Zayed emerged as a leading figure in the unified federation. As both UAE president and ruler of Abu Dhabi, he made efforts to consult with the other rulers on matters and refrained from using Abu Dhabi's wealth and power to gain an upper hand. Aware that the success of the federation depended on the ability of all the emirates to be developed and functioning, Sheikh Zayed also gave large revenues from Abu Dhabi's oil reserves to the other emirates.

Recent History

The 1970s were a period of dramatic change in the UAE. Oil prices rose and revenues poured into the emirates. Foreign workers arrived en masse to fill the thousands of new positions created by the oil industry and from 1968 to 1974 the Dubai's population doubled. Construction began and transformed the landscape. Despite these changes, the traditional political structure remained largely intact and the seven ruling sheikhs have maintained their authority within their emirate. During the 1980s, oil prices declined and social spending was limited. However, the UAE was not affected as much as other Gulf States due to its disproportionate oil wealth and small population. However, dwindling reserves in Dubai and Sharjah intensified efforts to diversify the economy.

The Persian Gulf War in 1991 brought further changes to the UAE. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait drew attention to the UAE's perils as a small state in the Gulf. Kuwait's destruction benefitted the UAE, particularly Dubai, which acquired much of Kuwait's trade and commerce. The Gulf War also brought stronger U.S. influences into the UAE, as it was a key host site for U.S. forces during the Gulf War. Strong economic ties, particularly between the UAE and U.S. oil companies, have been influential in developing this relationship. The U.S.-led War on Terrorism has also strengthened the relationship between the UAE and the United States and today, more U.S. Navy ships port at UAE than any other ports outside of the United States. Western influences are also pervasive in the UAE, which has caused consternation among the religiously conservative citizenry.

Today, the UAE continues to struggle with its rapid wealth and modernization. Mass consumerism, unchecked growth, and the presence of a large foreign population remain key challenges to both the federal and emirate governments. Additionally, despite its large oil reserves, the UAE is concerned by its economic dependence on oil and has continued to diversify its economy. The international economic recession in 2008 demonstrated the growing dependence of the UAE economy on international investment and trade, as its economy declined significantly due to a drop in these activities.

The emirates have also faced recent challenges over the issue of leadership and succession. The UAE weathered a challenge in 2002 when Sheikh Rashid of Dubai passed away and was peacefully replaced by his son, Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid. In 2006, Sheikh Zayed passed away and his son, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed, assumed the sheikhdom of Abu Dhabi and the presidency of the UAE. Given the immense role that Sheikh Zayed played in cementing the federation, there was concern that the UAE would weaken following his death. However, this does not appear to have happened.

IDENTITY AND AFFILIATIONS

Tribal and Family

Family and tribal relationships are among the most significant sources of identity for Emiratis. Kinship ties constitute the basic foundations of society and culture and an individual's social status and position in society is largely derived from these ties. The significance of kinship ties has made social mobility fairly difficult in UAE society.

The extended family remains the strongest and most cohesive social unit in the UAE. Loyalty to the family is expected in Emirati society. Many aspects of Emirati social life, particularly for Emirati women, are focused around the extended family. In the past, extended families operated as the basic units of production and often resided together. Today, individuals no longer depend on the extended family for economic survival and often live far away from their extended family members. Although these developments have weakened family ties in Emirati society, they have not removed them as a primary source of identity. Social networks continue to revolve primarily around kinship ties. Much of Emirati society remains structured along a patriarchic model, with leaders often being given titles such as the "Father of Abu Dhabi" or the "Father of Dubai."

Tribal ties remain significant in Emirati society, which continues to be shaped by a tribal structure. Tribes are composed of groups of individuals who trace their lineage to a common ancestor. Most tribes in the UAE have thousands of members and multiple branches. The tribes continuing significance is evidenced in the correlation between tribes and the emirate's political structure. Each emirate is governed by the head of the largest or most pow-

erful local tribe. Traditional tribal decision-making mechanisms, such as negotiation and consultation, remain significant means of contemporary political discourse.

The ruling tribes of each emirate have significant authority in UAE society. The Bani Yas, which has branches that rule Abu Dhabi and Dubai, is the most powerful tribal confederation. Abu Dhabi is more tribally complex than Dubai, where the main group, the Al Bu Falasa branch of the Bani Yas, is dominant and includes the ruling al-Maktoum family. In Abu Dhabi, the ruling family, the al-Nahyan, comes from the Al Bu Falah branch of the Bani Yas and has formed strategic alliances with other powerful branches of the Bani Yas and other tribes. Among these are the al-Sudan, Mahasir, and the al-Dhwahir. Tribes, or branches of tribes, are often very different based on their location, relative power, and primary economic pursuits. Although the al-Maktoum and al-Nahyan come from the same tribe, they are very different in orientation. The al-Nahyan have a strong connection to the desert and Bedouin life, while the al-Maktoum are urban and mercantile in their outlook.

Religion

Religion has shaped Emirati culture and society throughout history and is a key source of identity for today's Emiratis. Virtually every Emirati is Muslim and most non-citizens in the UAE are also Muslim, with smaller numbers of Hindus and Christians. There is religious freedom for non-Muslims in the UAE and there are a number of churches and one Hindu temple.

Most Emiratis are Sunni Muslims. Approximately 15 percent of Emiratis belong to the Shi'a minority, which resides primarily in Dubai and Sharjah. For most Emiratis, religion informs significant aspects of their lives. Many Emiratis believe that the prevalence

of Western cultural influences is corrupting and feel torn between the influence of the West and their Islamic beliefs. Many Emirati youth are more devout than elder generations and most Emiratis are religiously conservative.

Emirati Rivalries

Divisions between the emirates are very pronounced and emirate-level loyalties and identities are strong in the UAE. Although the federal state has grown since independence, the emirates retain significant authority in the daily lives of Emiratis and rivalries between emirates dampen efforts at greater unity. At times the emirates have even worked against each other, for example, an aggressive advertising campaign by Dubai in the 1990s to promote its port services led to the decline of activity at the port in Fujairah.

Emirate identities offer not just an awareness of an individual's place within the UAE; they also determine an individual's access to resources, which are funneled through each emirate's individual government. Emiratis in Abu Dhabi and Dubai have much greater access to state resources than those in the poorer emirates. This has created a sense of resentment among some Emiratis in the poorer emirates, who feel under-privileged compared to their wealthier countrymen. Many Emiratis from these emirates try to obtain "citizenship" in Abu Dhabi or Dubai in order to have access to better services. Despite gaining official status in these emirates, they do not lose their feelings of connection to their home emirate.

National Unity

Most Emiratis feel a strong connection to the UAE despite the federation's internal divisions based on tribe and emirate. In the face of outsiders, Emiratis identify first and foremost as citizens of the UAE. In many respects the emergence of a national identity has

occurred quickly. Sheikh Zayed, the previous ruler of Abu Dhabi and president of the UAE, had a principal role in bringing unity to the emirates. He campaigned for unity and spearheaded the federation. He offered significant financial resources to poorer emirates and funded the federal government. His efforts were assisted by the knowledge that the emirates were too small and vulnerable to be effective independently.

Today, national identity is more self-reinforcing. A new generation has grown up identifying with the UAE. Modern media and education have reinforced the shared values and culture that exists across the emirates. Most Emiratis live comfortably on state services and benefits. Additionally, UAE identity has formed in opposition to the large number of foreigners and dominance of foreign influences across the country. Many Emiratis fear that foreigners are undermining their culture and lifestyles. These fears have spurred Emiratis to actively formulate a national identity. The government has taken significant steps to promote a national identity based on a shared Arab, tribal and Islamic heritage. This has led to efforts to rebuild Emirati heritage through cultural preservation in museums and recreated historical villages and by fund-

Nationalism

The fact that nationals are constantly made aware of being 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.

~ Statehood and Nation-Building

ing traditional crafts like weaving and shipbuilding. In addition, Emiratis wear a style of national dress that is a significant method of distinguishing citizens from foreigners.

Regional Identity

Although Emiratis share significant cultural ties with their neighbors, most do not possess a strong sense of regional Gulf identity. However, regional identity may grow in coming years as restrictions on movement and commerce are lifted across the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Additionally, these states have similar, if not virtually identical, religious practices and cultural traditions and many also share tribal ties. Citizens of GCC states are able to travel between countries for employment and education with significantly fewer restrictions than other individuals. Marriage across GCC states is also increasing.

Foreign Workers

Since the earliest points in its history, the UAE has been a transnational center of trade and commerce. Its busy port location, a hub between Persia, India, and Africa, brought significant foreign influences into the country. These influences remain and have increased at an unprecedented rate. The discovery of oil and rapid modernization that followed greatly increased the demand for foreign workers. At the time, the local population was both too small and too unskilled to fill the new positions. The influx of foreigners has continued since the 1960s, and today foreign workers comprise approximately 80 percent of the UAE's population, nearly 90 percent of its workforce, and 60 percent of the state bureaucracy.

The staggering number of foreigners, one of the highest foreigner proportions in the world has made UAE citizens a small, but dispro-

portionately well-off, minority in their own state. Foreigners are most likely to interact with other foreigners rather than citizens in virtually every aspect of their daily life.

“Dubai has effectively become the most successful Asian nation in the Gulf.”

~Anthony Cordesman

This minority status has resulted in a backlash against foreigners, whom citizens believe are eroding their culture and threatening their identity. Additionally, foreign workers bring security concerns, human rights issues, and social stress. Despite these issues, the UAE depends heavily on foreigners for the functioning of the economy and the political system and state bureaucracy.

Foreign Population Composition

Approximately 80 percent of the foreign population in the UAE lives in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah, while far fewer live in the poorer northern emirates (mirroring the percentage of the local population in these emirates). Most of the foreigners in the UAE are young males. This is in part due to restrictions imposed by the UAE that require a foreigner to earn a certain salary before he is eligible to bring his family to the country. Most Indian, Arab, and Pakistani workers are males, while a larger percentage of the Filipino and Indonesian workers are female.

Most foreign workers in the UAE come from South or Southeast Asia, with smaller numbers from Arab countries and the West. The largest group of foreign workers, 40 percent, comes from India. Indians are the largest population group in Dubai and whole neighborhoods of the emirate are Indian, often giving it the name “the clean Bombay.” Of the Indian population in the UAE, half originate from the Indian state of Kerala and many of the migrants are Muslim. Indians are found in all socioeconomic tiers, includ-

ing the elite, middle class, and poor laborers. Pakistanis comprise approximately 16 percent of foreign workers.

Other Arabs comprise approximately 12 percent. Like Indians, these workers occupy all social classes. An Iranian population is also present in the country, particularly in Dubai. Though Iranians number only about 100,000, they have significant influence as many have long-standing ties to the UAE and are influential in the economy and government. Workers from Southeast Asia represent about 12 percent of foreigners in the UAE. However, their numbers have been greatly increasing in recent years due to the perception that they are willing to work for less and in harsher conditions than other groups. Most Asians work as laborers or domestic helpers, although some fill middle-class positions in retail shops and banks.

European and U.S. workers comprise approximately 1 percent of the UAE's foreign population. Despite their small size they are often given the most lucrative positions.

Discrimination

Within the UAE there is a clear and rigid hierarchy of foreigners based on their nationality, ethnicity, and occupation. Westerners are on top of this hierarchy followed by Arabs, and then Asians. Foreign workers and international organizations have levied accusations of abuse and human rights violations within the UAE. These include a failure to pay wages, physical and sexual abuse, violations of worker contracts, and forced prostitution. Although most foreigners receive higher wages than they are able to receive in their home countries, many live in harsh conditions under the constant insecurity of deportation.

Many of the problems foreign workers face in the UAE are caused by the sponsorship system that controls them. In order to be al-

lowed into the country, foreigners must have a sponsor, *kafeel*, which can be an individual, recruiting agency, or company. There is little official monitoring of the system, which has led to abuse. Most foreign workers have to pay large fees to their sponsors to obtain entry into the country and gain employment. Because they are making money off of each worker brought into the country, sponsors are motivated to bring in as many foreign workers as possible. Once in the country, sponsors wield a great deal of authority over their foreign workers. Workers must have permission from their sponsor to get a new job and often must pay a fee to their sponsor as well. The sponsor may also hold a worker's passport, making it impossible for the worker to leave the country or find new employment. Sponsors may also abuse their positions of authority, making workers perform other duties outside their standard job descriptions, such as home or vehicle repairs. Although workers have a right to report violations of their contracts or abuse, few do fearing reprisals. A worker's residency in the country is connected to their job and losing their position often means that they must also leave the country.

Stories of human rights abuses are common in the UAE. These affect primarily low-paid workers, typically day laborers and domestic servants. There are frequent complaints that workers are told they will hold a certain job at a certain pay rate but arrive to be told they will be paid less or have to work a different job. Most semi or unskilled workers go into significant debt to travel to the UAE, paying agents or sponsors substantial amounts to find them jobs, and they are forced to work at the lower rate to not lose this investment.

Although much discrimination is the result of individuals, it is also embedded in the system. Foreigners are grouped based on nationality, which often determines wages and benefits. Much

of the discrimination comes from other foreigners, as foreigners comprise nearly 90 percent of the workforce and many foreigners have foreign bosses. However, there is also an undercurrent of discrimination in the UAE and many Asian and other foreign workers feel that they are looked down on by elite foreigners and citizens.

Foreign Culture

Most foreign workers maintain their identity and culture while working and living in the UAE. Many reside in the UAE for a relatively short period before returning home. While in the UAE it

Social clubs for expatriate ethnic and national communities, like the Goan, Keralite, Jordanian, and Sudanese clubs, are used not only for recreation but also as centers for exchange of information on jobs and multiple forms of other support.

~ Migrants' Strategies

is common for foreign workers to interact with only their fellow countrymen. Each group has its own schools, religious centers, and social clubs, typically centered on their country of origin. Groups often live together in neighborhoods or housing centers. There is often a strong sense of shared identity within the community. However, ethnic and racial consciousness is often overshadowed by class-consciousness. There is a strong divide between the elite, middle, and lower classes and class segregation is apparent in UAE. Most upper and middle class workers make frequent efforts to distinguish themselves from their lower-class countrymen.

Cultural Disruptions

The influx of foreign workers into the UAE has contributed to the large-scale social upheavals that the country has experienced over the past four decades. The UAE's population has grown from a few hundred thousand in 1967 to more than 4 million today. The

influx of foreigners has brought linguistic and cultural influences into the country that has challenged local identity.

In Dubai and Sharjah it is more common to hear Urdu, Hindi, or English spoken on the street than Arabic. Additionally, the UAE's traditionally religiously conservative society has been opened to new foreign influences. Media, movies, and clothing from the West have penetrated society. Prostitutes from Eastern Europe and Asia are prolific in Dubai, which is sometimes deemed the Las Vegas of the Middle East.

Citizens of the UAE are also concerned about the political implications of the massive size of the foreign community. In Dubai, recent efforts to grant foreigners property rights have been met with resistance. Many believe that if foreigners were allowed to own property in the UAE they may demand greater rights and more freedoms and may acquire influence over UAE citizens. Additionally, the presence of large communities with loyalties to other nations is also deemed a potential political threat.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Family/Tribal Structures

Kinship institutions are significant throughout the UAE's society and make up the basic foundation of its contemporary social and political systems. UAE society is patriarchal and patrimonial, which influences family and political structures, both of which are governed by an elder male figure. Within families, the elder male has significant authority and there are clear hierarchies based on age and gender. While basic family structure persists in UAE society, many changes have occurred. Families often live far away from each other and are no longer needed for economic support.

Additionally, women's roles have changed. While traditionally women stayed in the home as homemakers and mothers, contemporary Emirati women have expanded opportunities in education and the workforce and many girls desire to have careers outside the home.

Marriage patterns have also changed in the UAE in recent decades. Many young Emiratis express a desire to choose their own spouse, which previously was the duty of their parents. Although marriage between cousins remains a preferred match, Emiratis are increasingly marrying outside of their extended families and immediate social networks. This has caused some consternation, as tribal society is traditionally exclusive and prefers not to welcome new members. The government has gotten involved in the issue, establishing a marriage fund that pays for a significant portion of wedding costs. This helps young couples pay for the often exorbitant cost of weddings, but also encourages intra-UAE marriage, as the funds are only available to young men marrying a fellow UAE citizen.

Tribal institutions remain significant in the UAE. Tribes are organized in a hierarchical and patriarchic manner and are led by a ruling sheikh. Sheikhs come from the most influential families in the tribe and are supposed to be great negotiators and peacemakers as well as great warriors. Additionally, sheikhs are supposed to be generous and support all members of the tribe.

The significance of tribal institutions in UAE society has diminished as the local and federal states have taken on many of the political, social, and economic roles that were previously carried out by the tribe. In the past, tribes provided economic and social support to members. They also offered physical protection and were the highest center of authority for most Emiratis. Contemporary

Emiratis no longer depend on the tribe for economic and social support or protection. However, the tribe remains a major structural force in society. Belonging to a well-respected tribe bestows prestige on individuals and often brings economic or political benefits. Tribal connections also continue to influence marriage patterns, employment opportunities, and social networks.

Political Institutions

Political authority in the UAE is invested in the heads of the ruling families who control both the federal and emirate-level political institutions. Political institutions have been heavily influenced by the UAE's tribal heritage, and in many ways today's institutions mirror the hierarchical and patriarchic structure of tribal institutions. Political leaders are expected to provide for their constituents and seek popular input through consultation and negotiation.

Rulers typically gauge public feedback through informal consultations with economic and tribal leaders and there is very little formalized public participation in the UAE. Despite this, there is very little domestic opposition to the government. In part this is due to the wealth and services that Emiratis receive from the government.

Federal Influence

The federal government has jurisdiction over foreign relations, defense, security, immigration, and communications. It has an executive, legislative, and judicial branch. The executive includes the President and Vice President, the Minister's Cabinet, and the Supreme Council. The Supreme Council is composed of the rulers of the seven emirates and is the highest federal authority. On matters of substance the Council must come to a five to two majority, with both Abu Dhabi and Dubai voting with the majority. Other executive positions are divided between the emirates. Since the



Presidential Palace in Abu Dhabi

founding of the federation, Abu Dhabi has held the presidency and Dubai the vice presidency.

The legislative arm of the federal government, the Federal National Council, has 40 members. These are appointed by the emirates and divided proportionally based on the local population distribution in 1971. The Council has limited authority, including reviewing legislation and appointing the Prime Minister, a position also held by Dubai. In 2006, the UAE undertook its first election in which half of the Council members were elected. This vote was largely the result of government efforts to expand public participation, not the result of popular demands. The rulers of the emirates selected a tiny portion of the population, less than 1 percent, to vote in the election.

The federal government has grown since 1971, yet remains subordinate to emirate-level bodies. It has no independent source of income, and depends entirely on donations from the emirates, primarily Abu Dhabi.

Emirate Influence

Emirate-level institutions have significant authority in the UAE and maintaining their integrity remains a key goal of rulers. Emirate institutions control local economic resources and are responsible for the internal rule of their emirate. The persistence of local institutions has often resulted in duplicate federal and emirate-level institutions performing similar tasks. The federal government funnels all money through emirate rulers and administrations. This has strengthened local leaders and entrenched their authority within the local government.

The make-up of emirate-level institutions varies greatly between emirates, with Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah having the most complex and diverse administrations. Despite these differences, each emirate is ruled by a local sheikh selected by family elders in the ruling family.

Judicial

In traditional UAE society, justice was handled by leading tribal figures. Arbitration was carried out at the request of the parties involved, both of which had to agree on the settlement. As the people of the UAE became increasingly sedentary and diverse populations settled in coastal villages, it became necessary for the rulers to establish court systems that could resolve disputes between residents with no tribal connections. These courts were the first attempt by rulers to establish a judiciary and a system of laws, which were based on Islamic law, or Shari'a.

Today's judiciary in the UAE is divided between local and federal courts and civil and Shari'a courts. Jurisprudence varies between emirates, as does the degree of federalization of the judiciary. Some emirates, particularly, Dubai and Ras al-Khamaih, are reluctant to cede to the federal court's authority. Recently, the UAE has undertaken initiatives to Islamize, modernize, and federalize the court system. These have met only limited success.

Courts in the UAE have limited freedom. Rulers often intervene in cases to obtain their desired verdict. There are many foreign judges in the UAE who fear being deported should their verdict be unpopular with leading authorities. Additionally, being wealthy and having social, economic, and political status helps individuals escape the full extent of the law.

Civil Society and Media

Civil society is not very vibrant in the UAE. A combination of government restrictions and self-censorship has limited the growth of civil society organizations. Although a small number of social and voluntary organizations are present in the UAE, few organizations receive the government approval necessary to form. Those that do are typically co-opted by the government. For many individuals, civil society organizations are not necessary. For citizens, family and tribal networks offer social support, while foreign workers are often not willing to risk deportation by participating in associations or organizations.

Media in the UAE has similar restrictions as civil society. Although large media networks exist, such as the international news station al-Arabiya, these commonly practice self-censorship. Many journalists in the UAE are foreign workers and risk deportation if they are too harsh in their criticism of the regime or UAE society. De-

spite this censorship, Emiratis have access to international media. Satellite dishes are very common in the UAE and many Emiratis have access to the internet.

Cultural Economy

Over the past 40 years the UAE has transformed from a few impoverished coastal villages to one of the wealthiest states in the world. The great and rapid wealth that was generated after oil production has driven all aspects of change in the UAE. This wealth has changed the UAE from an economy based on fishing, pearling, livestock, and some agriculture to an oil-based, high-income economy with a large concentration of foreign workers. As these changes occurred, old economic industries and modes of life collapsed and new socioeconomic realities were created during the 1960s and 1970s. Emiratis quickly transitioned from semi-nomadic pastoralists living a subsistence lifestyle to urban and suburban government employees, demanding high wages and living an often luxurious lifestyle. Today, the UAE's economy is defined by both Abu Dhabi's oil and Dubai's commerce.

Pre-oil Economy

The UAE's traditional economy was dominated by subsistence activities and pearling. Most of these activities required extended family members to work and reside together. Life was settled around rare freshwater sources at oases, in the mountains, or along the coast and many Emiratis lived a mobile lifestyle.

Oil

Oil was discovered in Abu Dhabi's desert in 1962. Oil dramatically transformed the UAE by bringing massive wealth and unprecedented social change. The UAE has one of the highest rates of

GDP per capita in the world, US\$25,000 and it is estimated that the GDP/capita of its citizenry is closer to US\$75,000. With nearly 10 percent of the world's proven oil reserves, the UAE could sustain current production levels for roughly a century. The UAE is also home to significant reserves of natural gas. Although oil has been the leading force in the economy, in the future gas exportation may play a larger role.

Most (87 percent) of UAE's oil reserves are located in Abu Dhabi, while Dubai and Sharjah claim the remaining share. This distribution has skewed development and growth in favor of these emirates. However, Abu Dhabi has heavily funded development in the other emirates. Additionally, the presence of vast revenues in the federal government has enabled large-scale economic diversification efforts in agriculture, fishing, and real estate.

Oil wealth has funded many ambitious development projects. The UAE has been transformed over the past four decades from villages of mud huts and palm frond houses to cities with massive skyscrapers, the world's tallest hotel, and man-made island communities. Education, health care and social services parallel those in the most developed countries in the world. Oil has also altered living patterns. While half a century ago a large proportion of the population was semi-nomadic and lived in the desert,



Fountain in UAE Hotel



Ceiling of Emirates Palace Hotel

today virtually all emirates are settled and most live in heavily-populated urban centers.

The way of life has changed dramatically for Emiratis. Many of the older generation were raised in a society that was completely different from today. They had no access to health care, education, or employment beyond subsistence activities. They were largely illiterate and had a world view limited to their extended families and tribes. Crossing the emirates took days by camel or horse. Younger generations have access to hospitals, grocery stores, and a multitude of transportation. They are highly educated and many have traveled the world. These changes are at times difficult for Emiratis and many older Emiratis are nostalgic for older days when life was simpler.

Large government revenues have increased the government's role in the economy. Abu Dhabi distributes oil revenues through emir-

ate administrations, which funnel the money to the people through large-scale public employment, development projects, and subsidies for housing and marriage. Many Emiratis have come to depend on the state rather than their extended family networks for economic prosperity. Additionally, the government is the main source of employment for Emiratis. Emiratis prefer the privilege and prestige of working in the public sector and are often unable to obtain jobs in the private sector due to competition from foreigners who are willing to work harder for less compensation.



Burj Al Arab Hotel

Diversified Industries

While oil is the backbone of the economy, commerce, trade, and business are also leading forces. This is particularly striking in Dubai, although is also the case in the other emirates. With most oil reserves in Abu Dhabi, diversification has become a means through which all of the emirates can be economically productive.

Commerce, Trade, and Banking

Dubai has become one of the most successful cities on the Gulf. Although oil wealth assisted in its development, and Abu Dhabi's oil wealth is available to bailout Dubai's economy in times

of economic crisis, oil production has never been as central to Dubai's economy or prosperity. Its strategic location on Dubai Creek enhanced the city's traditional prominence as a port. Today, Dubai boasts the world's largest man-made port. Dubai's ports are among the busiest in the world and Dubai's commerce and re-export (goods imported to Dubai and then exported to other locations) industries bring in significant revenue.

In addition to its bustling ports, Dubai is a leading financial and commercial center. Real estate and tourist developments have also put Dubai in the international spotlight. Among Dubai's most successful enterprises is the establishment of sector-specific free zones, such as the Jebel Ali free Zone, in which foreign companies can invest and forgo many of the country's restrictions on foreign labor and capital. Although Dubai's economic diversification has been largely successful, during the 2008 economic downturn it had to turn to Abu Dhabi and its vast oil revenues for a bailout.

Economic diversification is also significant in the other emirates. Fujairah has an active port on the Indian Ocean and Sharjah is home to many small-scale industries.

Traditional Activities

The UAE government has invested significant revenue into supporting and regenerating traditional economic activities. These are intended to diversify the economy as well as connect Emiratis with their cultural heritage. Camel racing has become a popular pastime and boat building remains a major craft in Ajman. Efforts have also been made to expand the UAE's limited agricultural sector. Traditionally, small-scale agriculture depended on irrigation canals that collected water from the Hajar Mountains or from wells in oases. The UAE has been able to fund large-scale de-

salination projects that have diminished water scarcity problems. Large sections of the desert have been turned green and are covered with trees and gardens. Subsidies are given to Emiratis who engage in agriculture or fishing. However, many of the traditional activities are now carried out by foreigners. Citizens often pay foreign workers to herd their camels or work on their farms.

Tourism

Tourism has been among the most successful diversified industries in the UAE. Dubai in particular has become a popular destination for regional and international tourists. Other emirates, particularly Fujairah and Sharjah, are also growing tourist destinations. The emirates have invested in architecture and leisure activities to draw tourists. Dubai is home to the world's largest hotel and the world's first underwater hotel. Additionally, water sports, racing, and shopping all draw millions of tourists to the country. The annual Dubai Shopping Festival is one of the most successful tourist events in the region. Even in the aftermath of the 11 September 2001 attacks, which many believed would weaken tourism, Dubai continued to draw millions of visitors.

Black Market

The UAE has had a long history as a center for illegal economic activities including smuggling, human trafficking, money laundering, and the arms trade. This is particularly true in Dubai, whose free-market economy places few restrictions on commercial and financial transactions. The massive numbers of foreigners moving across the country's borders and its relatively free financial market have made it a center for illegal economic activity. Money laundering has been particularly difficult for the UAE to control. In the 1990s, the Bank of Credit and Commerce International

(BBCI) scandal revealed the depth of the issue. The BBCI was the world's fifth largest privately owned bank when accusations of money laundering surfaced. Even the ruler of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Zayed was implicated in the scandal and reportedly billions in investments were lost. Recent accusations that the UAE is rife with terror-affiliated money-laundering operations have prompted the UAE to enforce stricter financial measures.

Human trafficking is another serious issue in the UAE. Once a key stopover for slave traders, the UAE has continued to be a major destination for human trafficking. Accusations that the UAE had used trafficked Pakistani children as camel jockeys prompted the government to ban human jockeys and replace them with mechanical robot jockeys. The sex trade is another booming business in the UAE, particularly Dubai. Although some of the women arrive willingly to work as prostitutes, large numbers are tricked into prostitution after being told they would fill other jobs and then having their passports confiscated by their sponsors once they arrive.

Cultural Division of Labor

The UAE has a segmented workforce. The most significant division is between citizens and foreigners. Most Emiratis work in the public sector, and although they compose only approximately 10 percent of the labor force, they receive disproportionate compensation for their work. In addition to an inflated income, citizens also receive extensive social services, such as housing and educational allowances. Foreigners work in both the private and public sectors and make-up more than 90 percent of the workforce. They are often given preference by private sector employees because they are willing to work harder for less money and expect fewer benefits. Many citizens are also not trained to fill many jobs and continue to focus on social sciences in their

Oil Jobs

The local populations of the pre-oil Gulf societies were small and lacked the technical skills needed for modernizing their traditional societies. Because of this, the importation of labour of all levels of skill has been adopted since the start of the oil economy as a major State policy in all Gulf countries.

~ Migrants' Strategies

education rather than pursuing degrees that are needed to fill many of the jobs, such as engineering.

Although Emiratis, due to their small percentage of the population, could not fill all the jobs in the UAE, there is some concern that the economy relies too heavily on foreign labor. This has prompted the government to actively pursue a policy of Emiratization, or promoting greater citizen participation in the workforce. Although this policy has been successful in some fields, such as banking and teaching, it has done little to limit the foreign presence in the country. Efforts at Emiratization have been undermined by efforts to diversify, particularly in free zones where restrictions on foreign labor do not apply. Additionally, the private sector, which relies most on foreign workers, has been growing at a faster pace than the public sector.

Emirati women have low rates of labor force participation. Although more educated than their male countrymen, cultural and social pressures often keep women at home. There is a much higher unemployment rate for women, 18.7 percent, compared to 8.2 percent for men. However their numbers in the workforce have been growing. Due to the small size of the UAE citizenry, females in the workforce are a necessary component of Emiratization and have been promoted by the government.

CUSTOMS AND PRACTICES

Language

Arabic is the UAE's official language. Most Emiratis speak the Gulf dialect, which is common throughout the region. However, Arabic has become increasingly marginalized by the large number of foreign workers who speak other languages including English, Hindi, or Urdu. English has become the language of trade, and increasingly the language of education in the UAE. This is in part due to the efforts of the late Sheikh Zayed, who believed every citizen should be able to speak both Arabic and English.

At some universities, such as Zayed University, curriculum is taught only in English. Urdu and Hindi are also very common languages in the UAE due to the large South Asian population. In Dubai it is common to hear either Hindi or English spoken on the street, even by local policemen, although in Abu Dhabi Arabic is more common. There is concern among Emiratis that the large number of foreign workers raising Emirati children is contributing to the inability of many children to speak Arabic well. Some children enter primary school with only limited knowledge of Arabic.

Diet

Traditional UAE diet is similar to that in other parts of the Gulf and includes dates, nuts, rice, and a variety of stews and dips. *Mansaf*, a communal lamb dish served over rice, is a popular at special occasions as a mark of hospitality. Arabic coffee and tea are also very significant in Emirati society and are served to entertain guests.

Many aspects of the Emirati diet have changed as a result of economic development and foreign influences. Cuisine from all cor-

ners of the world is available throughout the emirates. Fast food and chain restaurants have sprung up in every city. Wealth has allowed Emiratis to readily consume items, such as meat, which were previously reserved only for special occasions. Although almost all food eaten in the UAE is imported, recent efforts by the government to promote local agriculture have increased homegrown food, such as dates and alfalfa.



Spice Market

Dress

Nearly all Emiratis wear traditional or Islamic dress in the emirates, although many dress in Western clothing while abroad. Western clothing was common in the UAE in the 1970s and 1980s, but national and traditional dress has reemerged as a symbol and hallmark of Emirati citizenship. For men, the national dress includes an ankle-length white shirt called a *kandoura* or *dish-dash*, under which white pants and a shirt are often worn. Emirati men also wear a white headdress that is held in place by a rope, or *aqal*. Wearing this national dress distinguishes Emirati men from the large foreign population, which commonly wears Western-style or their own cultural clothing.

Emirati women wear various forms of Islamic dress, either a *hijab*, *burka*, or *abaya*, which cover most of the body and reveal different amounts of the face. Despite this commonality, Emirati

women often try to express uniqueness through the way in which they wear their *abaya* or with adornments, such as jewelry.

Camel Racing

The camel has a central place in the hearts of Emiratis as a connection to their history and heritage. The camel is considered central to the nomadic and desert life of Emirati ancestors. In traditional UAE society, camel

Camels and Culture

That modern camel racing functions as a cultural museum and provides an ideological link with the past while serving as an inspiration for patriotic loyalty, and that camel racing embodies values for the political enculturation for younger generations, are themes frequently repeated by the media and invoked in Badu poetry.

~ Poetics and Politics



Camel Ranch in UAE

races were held at special occasions such as weddings and visits by sheikhs.

Today, camel racing has transformed into a lucrative and competitive sport. By the mid-1990s, more than 4,000 camels were participating in annual camel races. Race tracks are present near major cities and the most significant races are attended by the president and other leading public figures.

Poetry

Poetry is a significant tradition for many Emiratis and is the most significant art form in the UAE. Even the rulers of the emirates have been known to write and recite poetry. Today, poets retain a position of prestige and poetry is often recited at festivals, celebrations, and even sporting events. Common themes include not only love and life but also politics and economics. Many Emiratis believe that poetry has the ability to change and transform the listener and is a key medium for expressing views and opinions.

Ceremonies

Life-cycle ceremonies, such as weddings, births, and circumcisions, are significant in Emirati life. These occasions are times for family and friends to gather and display hospitality and generosity. These events are also times in which Emiratis commemorate their heritage. In particular, weddings are characterized by singing, dancing, chanting, and camel racing.

Dwellings

Dwellings in the UAE have changed greatly in the past century from traditional homes made of palm fronds and mud to contemporary multi-storied, air-conditioned houses. Contemporary Emiratis live in

urban or suburban areas in modern and spacious houses. Most foreign workers also live in comfortable housing although the lowest paid workers often find it difficult to afford housing and live in poor and crowded conditions.

Traditional UAE architecture was inspired by Arab and Islamic traditions, although there were significant influences from Persia and India. Among these influences were traditional wind towers, which extended up from buildings and had open windows at the

top to circulate breeze through the often stifling lower rooms. These towers came from Persia, yet are often considered a symbol of traditional UAE architecture. Although air conditioning is now found in almost every building, wind towers are still constructed for ornamental purposes. There have been some efforts to incorporate traditions into new construction. For example, the man-made palm island housing community was constructed in the shape of a palm tree, the symbol of desert life.



Tower under Construction

