CHAPTER 2: HISTORY AND BACKGROUND OF THE UAE

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The degree of social change and the development of a society may be measured by the degree of women's emancipation in that society (Soffan, 1980:9). Depending on one's focus, Muslim Arab society may appear advanced or backward in terms of women's emancipation (Soffan, 1980:9). At the time of the rise of Islam, 1 400 years ago, Muslim Arab society would have been considered most progressive in its treatment and attitude towards women. However, as time progressed, new traditions were created and given the label of Islamic authenticity when in reality, they were far from what the Holy Qur'aan and Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him)[1] had described as the principles and practises affecting women (Soffan, 1980:9).

In the West, the Industrial Revolution helped spur positive changes in attitudes towards women. In Muslim Arab society modifications of their status have also come about for many different reasons. At times modifications occurred as a result of a religious reform movement, at other times as an outgrowth of a national liberation movement or perhaps as a result of the need to use human resources to bring about rapid development in certain areas.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide historical and recent background information on the UAE with regards to its culture and society. Historical and current perspectives will help to elucidate factors that have influenced and continue to affect the position of women in the UAE and their roles in society. The chapter commences with a history of the UAE and then goes on to discuss the status of women in UAE society. Finally it explores the current implementation of the Emiratisation process. All of these are significant factors that provide context for this study.

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[1] Peace be upon him is added after Prophet Muhammed as a sign of respect.

2.2 HISTORY OF THE UAE

2.2.1 Pre-Islamic society

Very little is known about the pre-Islamic civilisations along the south-eastern tip of Arabia, except that the trading activity at Julfar (Ras Al-Khaimah) and Dibba (Fujairah and Sharjah) brought people and goods from both the far and the near east to the region before recorded history. The Sassanian and the Byzantine Empires together constituted the two great powers of the period (King, 1997:77). The Sassanian were mainly Zoroastrians (fire-worshippers) from Persia and the Byzantines were Christians from the Eastern Roman Empire. The Sassanians controlling the region had a stronghold in Yemen. The history of this era is plagued with military clashes between tribal communities and the Sassanians, as well as inter-tribal conflicts.

Prior to Islam, the people of this region were mainly idol worshippers who worshipped an idol named *Bajar* or *Bajir* (King, 1997:82). Historians consider pre-Islamic society of Southern Arabia as distinct from that of Northern or Central Arabia. In Southern Arabia, the principle of solidarity between king and subject has been traced to pre-Islamic times. Power relations within the tribe included the leader, the leader's family and a group of families that supported the leader. The inhabitants could be divided into the two traditional categories of the *hadar* (settled people) and the *bedu* (nomadic people of the desert).

The pre-Islamic economic activity of the region revolved mainly around fishing, pearling, shipping, trading and farming. Traditional gender roles were prevalent during this time where women were viewed as weak, vulnerable and in need of protection. Women's roles were restricted to the roles of housewife and mother (Al-Darmaki, 1998:1). The general tasks that women did included preparing food, repairing clothes and tents, farm labour and selling merchandise in the local market.

Although there was no integrated social system at the time, the society could not be regarded as chaotic. The social system revolved around a collection of several tribes. The tribes were held together first through blood ties and then through tradition that dictated moral obligations, social duties and rights. Patai (1959:19 as cited by Sayed, 2001:7) describes pre-Islamic family relations in this region as being:

- Endogamous – practising marriage within one's social group;
- Patrilineal – practising marriage through the father and male line;
- Patriarchal – empowering the father with formal and final authority over the family;
- Extended – including three or more generations within the same household; and
- Polygynous – practising a plurality of wives.

Much has been written about women in pre-Islamic Arabia. Most historians agree that variations existed in the status of women. These variations were based mainly on social class, tribal affiliation and geographic location. According to Soffan (1980:14) women of this period enjoyed social freedom because they moved freely amongst their tribesmen unveiled. It is possible that in the cities there was some veiling but this was a custom imported from the East and the extent of its practise is not fully known (Jeffery, 1949:56-57).

There were three types of marriage arrangements in pre-Islamic Arabia. The marriage arrangement stemmed from a girl's socio-economic status and would ultimately determine her life's chances. None of the following marriage arrangements included contractual arrangements or witnesses. They were:

- *Benna* – a permanent marriage where a woman remained with her kin (under their protection);
- *Mutah* – a temporary marriage where the woman was visited by her husband irregularly for an agreed upon period of time;

- *Baal (a)* – women who were purchased from their families; and *Baal (b)* – women who were captured in wars.

In *Baal* marriages, women were no more than exploited slaves. In *Benna* and *Mutah* marriages, women could instigate divorce but their ex-husbands could prevent them from remarrying. According to Stern (1939:70), it is uncertain whether or not polygamy as we now know it existed. For the female, marriage usually took place at puberty while marriage for the male could take place at any time. The age of the groom in relationship to the bride was not important. The most important criterion in making a suitable match was that the groom should be equal to or above the girl in station, for to marry below one's rank would bring dishonour to the tribe (Jeffery, 1949:45). In addition, women had no rights to inheritance or property ownership as even their *mahr* (dowry) was given to their father or guardian and never to the bride personally, thus leaving women completely dependent and subject to their men-folk (Levy, 1971:95).

While it is not clear whether female infanticide was practised in this part of Arabia, it was practised amongst various pagan tribes of that era. The reasons for female infanticide were, according to Al-Faruqui (1994:2), as follows:

- A strong desire for honour of the tribe which would be damaged through sexual indiscretions of its women or through their capture and enslavement during battles;
- Poverty;
- Sacrifice to Gods; and
- Lack of a male population rendered females useless to the tribe.

Very likely, the most significant development of this area was the introduction of Islam, not only as a means to faith and direction but also as a comprehensive social, political, legal and economic system (Sayed, 2001:7). The introduction of Islam raised the status of women in society and provided them with equal rights to men (Sayed, 2001:7).

2.2.2 Islamic society

While a serious in-depth study of the introduction of Islam to this part of Arabia is beyond the scope of this study, the following will highlight some areas where Islamic concepts and practises helped to improve the status of women. The main source of information is the Holy Qur'aan that Muslims accept as the word of God to humankind. Muslims believe it was presented through revelation to the prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). As the Holy Book, it addresses believers of both sexes and its language is gender-neutral.

The Holy Qur'aan addresses women twenty-four times and men twenty-four times. When addressing both sexes, it either specifies both sexes or it uses the gender-neutral plural. Translations into English introduce gender-biased language that may affect interpretation by readers. In this study the English translation of The Holy Qu'raan by Ali (1946) is used. **Appendix A** provides the direct English translation (Ali, 1946) of the verses referred to in the text below[2].

All duties to be performed by the community of believers are deemed as equal (The Holy Qur'aan, *surah* 4 *ayat* 124). For example, all male and female community members are expected to believe in one God and that the prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) is the final messenger, to pray, fast, give charity and perform pilgrimage (The Holy Qur'aan, *surah* 33 *ayat* 35 & *surah* 2 *ayat* 177). "Whoever works righteousness, man or women, and has faith, verily to him will we give a new life, a life that is good and pure, and we will bestow on such their reward according to the best of their actions" (The Holy Qur'aan, *surah* 16 *ayat* 97).

According to the Holy Qur'aan men and women were created from a single soul, "It is he who created you from a single person and made his mate of like nature" (The Holy

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[2]Referencing is done in accordance with the divisions used by Ali (1946:xxi). According to subject matter, the Holy Qur'aan is arranged into 114 *surahs* consisting of a number of *ayats* (verses). According to Ali (1946:xxi), the most convenient form of quotation is to name the *surah* and the *ayat* (verse).

Qur'aan, *surah* 7 *ayat* 189). Muslims do not believe that man was created in the image of God. According to the Holy Qur'aan, the *first sin* was one of arrogance and superiority, with Satan believing that he was superior to Adam and acting on that belief. The sin committed by Adam and Eve when they decided to eat from the *forbidden tree* came later. In this regard, both Adam and Eve committed a sin, both were questioned, both admitted to it, both repented and both were forgiven. There is no concept of the *evil temptress* Eve in Islam, no concept of the mother of all evil. Subsequently, Muslim mothers do not have to shoulder the blame for all that has gone wrong since the onset of creation and women in general are not considered to be inherently untrustworthy.

Islamic law, as laid down by the Holy Qur'aan, was, of necessity, strict and emphatic because of the fact that Arab society was a very conservative and recalcitrant one (Soffan, 1980:14). There would have been no need for such a legal system had religious and ethical standards been comprehensively applied in all areas of human behaviour, but with regards to the position of women, family life, retaliation, wine drinking, usury and gambling new standards had to be drawn (Schacht, 1955:28-33). Islam also changed the mentality of both men and women and created a new respect between them based on mutual understanding, taking care of women and respecting them was also emphasised (Mawdudi, 1993:154-155). From the beginning, Islam stressed that women, as half of society, should be offered all opportunities, which could enable them to develop their natural abilities so that they might participate effectively in the development of society. It also emphasised that women should be allowed to attain the highest ranks of progress materially, intellectually and spiritually (Jawad, 1998:6-7). According to Jawad (1998:7) it is within this context that Islam has granted women the right to education, training and work opportunities.

Regarding education, both the Holy Qur'aan and the *sunnah* (what the prophet Muhammed [peace be upon him] said and did), advocate the rights of men and women equally to seek knowledge (Jawad, 1998:8). All Muslims are required to read, think and contemplate signs. With reference to education, men and women were equally encouraged to strive towards continuous and lifelong learning (The Holy Qur'aan, *surah*

20 *ayat* 114 & *surah* 39 *ayat* 9). There were several notable women scholars at the time of the prophet's death (Al-Faruqui, 1994:77). Specific women who are featured in the Holy Qur'aan are in no way demeaned or denigrated. Some examples are Mary, the mother of Jesus, who is the example of the highest woman of all creation, The Queen of Sheba, who in her meeting with Solomon realised the difference between reality and illusion, and the Pharaoh's wife who possessed the righteousness and courage to challenge the most powerful man of her time. The prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) also encouraged education for both males and females. In this connection, the following *ahadith* (sayings of the prophet Mohammed [peace be upon him]), can be quoted, "search for knowledge though it be in China" (as cited by Jawad, 1998:17)

Legal rights include the right to life and female infanticide is strictly forbidden (The Holy Qur'aan, *surah* 6 *ayat* 151, *surah* 81 *ayats* 8-9 & *surah* 17 *ayat* 31). Separate identity is also given to women to ensure that there is no transfer of ownership and title after marriage. Women were also given the right to freedom from spousal abuse, to seek divorce and to remarry (The Holy Qur'aan, *surah* 2 *ayat* 229 & *surah* 2 *ayat* 231). There are also rules that society must follow to ensure that women are treated in an equitable and respectful manner. The prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) encouraged his followers to be kind, civil and considerate when dealing with women. In an *ahadith* it is stated that, "The more civil and kind a Muslim is to his woman whether wife, daughter or sister the more perfect in faith he is" (Doi, 1989 as cited by Jawad, 1998:11).

Based on physiology, women and men are assigned different roles in society. A woman's primary responsibility is to bear, nurture and educate healthy and secure children. Her participation in public life should not come at the expense of this primary objective. A man's primary responsibility is to provide for and protect those within his extended family for whom he is responsible. His activities in public life should not jeopardise the family unit. Ideally the respective roles are complementary, cooperative and mutually respectful (The Holy Qur'aan, *surah* 2 *ayats* 233 & 240 & *surah* 4 *ayats* 5 & 34). In Islam, there is absolutely no value differential attached to either role and as such both roles are equally important to society as a whole.

Islam gave women the right to own, manage, contract or hold their own property as well as the right to inheritance. A woman's inheritance is only half that of the male inheritor due to the fact that males are directly responsible for supporting their immediate and extended families and others in need of help. A woman's inheritance however, is her own and it is illegal for a male relative or her spouse to claim it (The Holy Qur'aan, *surah* 4 *ayats* 7, 19, 21 & 25). Women are granted the right to conduct business, participate in the economic world, choose a spouse and have economic protection of a pre-nuptial agreement within a marriage contract. Legally women are not responsible for financially contributing to the maintenance of the family home and any contribution is strictly voluntary (The Holy Qur'aan, *surah* 4 *ayat* 4).

With the advent of Islam, tribal affiliations became more interconnected possibly for the first time in Arab history, and women were considered equal members. All Quranic references to the Muslim *ummah* or community refer to both men and women. Islam gave women the right to participate in the political process 1 400 years ago. Friday prayers served as town council meetings where all participants were encouraged to voice their views publicly to the leader. There are numerous documented examples of how women were vocal and active in this process both during and immediately after the life of the prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him). Women also had direct access to leadership. It is generally accepted amongst scholars and historians that the emergence of Islam raised the status of women. In the late seventh and eighth century women became city officials, administrators, teachers, writers, scholars, business leaders, judges and advisors to the *caliphs* (leaders).

The practise of veiling and seclusion was not introduced by the prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him), but women were advised to cover themselves modestly (The Holy Qur'aan, *surah* 24 *ayat* 31). Interestingly, veiling and seclusion were not purely Muslim practises, Jews and Christians in the Middle East also veiled and secluded their women until the twentieth century (Patai, 1967:117 as cited by Sayed, 2001:8). The explanation for modesty is that women would not be attacked in public (The Holy Qur'aan, *surah* 33

ayat 59). As men and women have equal status in Islam, men are similarly advised (The Holy Qur'aan, *surah* 24 *ayat* 30).

So, from an authentic Islamic perspective, "a woman is an individual, worthy of dignity and respect, an independent human being, a social person, a legal person, a responsible agent, a free citizen, a servant of God and a talented person, endowed like a male person, with heart, soul and intellect; and has the fundamental right to exercise her abilities in all areas of human activities" (Abdul-Rauf, 1977:29).

Undeniably, Islam provided solutions to problems plaguing women and it succeeded in elevating their status. Social attitudes and traditions, however, are always the hardest and slowest to change, especially in a tribal society (Soffan, 1980:17). Slowly, throughout the Muslim world, gradual erosion of the rights of women took place (Sayed, 2001:9). The level and degree of this erosion varied substantially due to conditions such as war, level of development, economics, politics, foreign invasion, infusion and creation of social systems and the interpretations of scholars throughout history. These events had a marked effect on women's political, economic and social rights as is evident in the region's recent history.

2.2.3 Recent history

The rise of Islam in the Southern Arabian region facilitated unity amongst tribal leaders that was necessary to defeat the Sassanian and drive them back to Iraq or Persia and for centuries the region was not dominated by a foreign entity. Not long afterwards, the Islamic ideal of one community gave way to a strong disposition towards tribalism. This was due in part to the economic disparity of the region that prompted frequent tribal invasions and counter invasions. There were two foreign invasions worth noting that took place in this region. The first was that of the Portuguese under Vasco de Gama. Up until that point, foreign navigators lacked knowledge of the seas and the resulting ability to conquer the inhabitants of the region (Hawley, 1971:68). Somehow in the early sixteenth century Vasco de Gama found maps produced by Arab navigators. As a result, the

Portuguese launched a brutal invasion and their occupation of the coast lasted nearly 143 years (1507-1650).

The Portuguese were driven out of the region in 1633 when they lost control of the Strait of Hormuz. Then the Dutch and British fought each other to gain control of the Gulf until the British drove the Dutch out of the region in 1766. The British were interested in the region's waters as a trade route for goods that they claimed from the conquered Indian sub-continent. When the inhabitants of Southern Arabia attempted to reclaim their waters, the British labeled them pirates and labeled the coast from Ras Al-Khaimah to Oman, *The Pirate Coast*. The British then bombarded the region, forced a de-militarisation of the coast and in 1820 signed treaties with nine rulers of the region (Al-Fahim, 1995:30).

British historians claim that this treaty brought stability and prosperity to this region, however, with the exception of forty prosperous years between 1890 and 1930 there was little economic prosperity in the region prior to the discovery of oil (Sayed, 2001:10). Al-Fahim (1995:61) writes, "we had gained nothing from 150 years of British domination." The economic hardship and foreign interference in the domestic affairs continued to spur inter-tribal conflict well into the twentieth century. Society itself did not change much for centuries. Women's roles and responsibilities within the society was multiple and varied. Prior to the discovery of oil the majority of women in this part of Arabia led fairly public lives. Only a small number of the social elite were separated from the general public.

Fifty years ago, some of the tribes of the Trucial States[3] were nomadic, leading camels and goods across the desert from pasture to pasture. Others were settled farmers, pearl divers or fishermen. There were also traders and shipbuilders. Some would spend part of the year on the coast and other parts of the year inland. The pearling boats would set sail in the summer months and return after 120 days. After a decline in the pearling industry, the country endured severe economic hardship, until the discovery of oil in the 1960s. After the British left the region in 1971, the rulers of the Emirates initiated a unification

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[3] Trucial States was the British name given before 1971 to the area covering what is now known as the UAE

effort (Al-Fahim, 1995:37) and H.H. Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahayan took the reins of leadership of the UAE.

2.2.4 H.H. Sheikh Zayed

Prior to the establishment of the federation, H.H. Sheikh Zayed was the Ruler's Representative of the Oasis of Al-Ain. For the past thirty-seven years (1966-2003), H.H. Sheikh Zayed's leadership has served to improve and advance the lives of the people in the UAE. Sir William Thesiger described his meetings with Sheikh Zayed in his book *Arabian Sands* as follows, "he was always available to listen to the problems of his people, and he tried the problems of those who came to him for judgment so that they would leave quietly, content with his judgments which were distinguished by their astute insights, wisdom and fairness" (Thesiger, 1991:236).

British political agent Sir Hugh Boustead on a visit to Al-Ain was amazed by the improvements in the living standards initiated by Sheikh Zayed in a short space of time and with very few resources. He stated that, "…everything that he (Sheikh Zayed) managed to accomplish in Al-Ain and surrounding areas were all for the benefit of his people" (UAE Government Website, 2002:6).

In 1971, six Emirates, namely, Abu Dhabi, Sharjah, Dubai, Ajman, Umm Al-Quwain, and Fujairah were united. Ras Al-Khaimah joined the unification a year later in 1972. The state was thus formally established with a declaration from H.H. Sheikh Zayed that the UAE had been established as an independent state with the aim of maintaining independence, stability and cooperation. One of the major aims of this unification is that the government will endeavour to provide a better life for all UAE citizens as well as provide support and assistance to Arab causes and interests. The UAE is governed under a patriarchal system, which can be redefined in a cultural context. The patriarch is trusted to make consultation based decisions that benefit the whole (Sayed, 2001:12). The patriarch is the one who carries responsibility for family, organisation and the nation

guided by principles and basing decisions and actions on insight, foresight and shared values (Sayed, 2001:12).

The people of the UAE are aware that H.H. Sheikh Zayed has accepted responsibility of leadership of a nation as a father would accept responsibility for his family. He has astounded observers of all kinds by his dedication to his people, his commitment to their progress and his humanitarianism. He has driven the development of a nation through his openness to ideas, opinions and concerns for his people. He has done all this while keeping up with the pulse of the federation through communication and consultation. H.H. Sheikh Zayed's speeches and priorities over the past thirty-seven years can be characterised as completely egalitarian and non-discriminatory.

In both words and action he has made it clear that he supports the women of the UAE Women in the UAE have greatly benefited from H.H. Sheikh Zayed's belief in their abilities to play an equal role in building the nation, combined with his respect for their roles as mothers. In a speech, the President declared:

> Women have the right to work everywhere. Islam gives women their rightful status and encourages them to work in all sectors as long as they are afforded the appropriate respect. The basic role of women is the upbringing of children but over and above that we have to support a woman who chooses to perform other functions. What women have achieved in the Emirates in only a short span of time makes me both happy and content. We sowed our seeds yesterday and today, the fruit has already begun to appear. We praise God for the role that women play in our society and it is clear that this role is beneficial both for present and future generations (Ministry of Information and Culture Official Website, 2002:4).

Although equality of status for UAE women has been propagated and is desired, UAE national women are still affected and bound by tradition and culture with regards to

marriage, family life and education. These factors inevitably have a bearing on their status in UAE society.

2.3 THE STATUS OF WOMEN IN UAE SOCIETY

2.3.1 Marriage in the UAE

Islamic laws relating to marriage and family remain fully intact in the UAE (The Middle East, 1978:74). Polygynous marriage is acceptable in Islam and is present in UAE culture. In Islam, for a marriage to be considered valid, no religious or ceremonial rites are necessary. Instead a marriage contract is drawn up (either orally or written), consisting of an offer by a man and acceptance by a woman before a minimum of two witnesses. The contract must not stipulate that it is of limited duration and must be made public (Abu Zahra, 1955:132). Then, when all the necessary conditions are met, such as payment of *mahr* (dowry), the contract is completed.

Marriage is generally by arrangement and the bride rarely meets the groom before the wedding, unless they are related as marriages between first cousins are common. According to interviews conducted by Soffan (1980:30), marriages were arranged by the parents and the approval of the girl was solicited. The majority of UAE women preferred that their own daughters be allowed a greater say in this important decision, although the father's opinion would still carry great weight (Soffan, 1980:31). Even though Islam does not stipulate any special age for either the bride or groom, it is generally accepted that both must attain puberty. In the UAE the average age for females to marry (up to the recent past) was between 13-15 years (Soffan, 1980:31). However, educational opportunities available for women today have resulted in a postponement of marriage. The government has also supported a delay in marriage by passing mandatory education laws. Although families are not forced to keep their daughters in school, most families are aware of the benefits of education. A natural outcome of this is that while previously the groom was nearly twice the age of his bride, today's groom is closer in age to that of his bride.

In accordance with the rules of Islam and tribal traditions the dowry is paid to the bride. Before the discovery of oil and the expanded employment opportunities that accompanied it, a man would pay an agreed sum for dowry. This amount was not unreasonably high in the past but with the discovery of oil and the spread of wealth, the cost of dowries has soared costing a prospective groom anywhere between fifty thousand to one million dirhams (Soffan, 1980:33). It is now expected that the dowry will not only include a fixed price for the bride but also a sum for her father (Soffan, 1980:33). This is considered one of the reasons why national men marry foreign women thereby avoiding these exorbitant costs. While the girls themselves regard marriage as a good form of social security as well as an important religious obligation, they place the blame for high dowries on parents (Soffan, 1980:33). The UAE government has intervened to put an end to the high dowries but this has been met with little success (Soffan, 1980:34). A marriage fund has been set up in the UAE to assist prospective grooms with these costs and the governments in the various Emirates pay for mass weddings to alleviate the costs and to prompt UAE national men to marry national women.

In an article in the Gulf News (Nazzal, 2003:2) it was reported that young national men are forming societies to help them marry. Members of the society contribute monthly installments for a period of fifty months and when any member gets married he receives a lump sum of AED 75 000 to assist with marriage expenses. Responses such as these indicate that the cost of marriage is too high for many national males. However, it is preferred that national men marry national women to reduce the numbers of unmarried national females and also because family life can then be maintained within the UAE cultural context.

2.3.2 Family life

Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, women in the UAE participated actively in society. Women tended to farm animals, sold goods in the *souk* (market), drew water from the well, collected firewood, and communicated with both male and female

members of the tribe (Sayed, 2001:41). Some would fish and others owned boats. Husbands and fathers would be gone for months at a time and women would tend to all of the needs of the family. People lived in tribal communities where all members of the community were known and family ties were strong. There was a social trust and inter-dependency amongst members of the community.

Both husband and wife cooperated to ensure that the needs of the family were met. For example, "if a visitor travelled eight days by camel and arrived but the husband was not home, the wife would prepare food and shelter for the visitor on behalf of the husband. Women were trusted and respected, she would do this for the sake of her husband" (Sayed, 2001:41). Women would not socialise or chat with a stranger or *prohibited male*, but they or one of the children would offer him food or shelter.

Both observations and interviews by Soffan (1980:28-47) indicate that extended families are closely intertwined and interconnected. Two or three generations often lived communally. This established a social support mechanism for women as well as a sense of security and belonging for members of the group including children. In general, women remain part of the extended family group as the family group offers a support network and protection. Migratory patterns are threatening this system as people move to commercially developed Emirates like Abu Dhabi or Dubai. Employment opportunities in these Emirates result in families moving away from home and becoming isolated from the extended family. In addition, if these women work, there is total dependence on housemaids to assist them with their domestic and child care responsibilities.

UAE families in general treat male and female children differently, with males getting preferential treatment (Jawad, 1998:12). This tendency may be related to pre-Islamic attitudes when female behaviour was considered the main source of family honour, or rather her potential for misbehaviour as the main source of dishonour to the family. This attitude has been abused by both males and females (mothers-in-laws, sisters etcetera) to keep a tighter rein on younger females. Preferential treatment of male children has no basis in the religion of Islam where the Prophet Muhammed (peace be upon him) asserted

the right of a female child to be treated on an equal footing with her brother (Jawad, 1998:12).

Families are patriarchal but both male and female roles are thought to be essential to the health of the family. Men ultimately have the responsibility for the well being of the family as this is both a social and religious duty. Women are assigned the nurturing, primary care-giving role within the family. A survey reported by the Gulf News (6 June 2000 as cited by Sayed, 2001:42), shows that UAE national women chose *a man with faith in Islam* as the number one quality they look for in a husband. This indicates that women prefer men who are aware of their roles as husbands in accordance with the teachings of Islam, which provides women with equal status.

According to Al-Khateeb (1994:17) and Soffan (1980:122), prior to the discovery of oil, the average woman was an active member of society. While the increased wealth has improved the standard of living of most of the inhabitants of the UAE, whether it has improved the status of women is a subject of debate. A survey conducted by Sayed (2001:1-91) showed a recurring theme among male participants. National males thought that women were losing their value in society, or that women used to be more highly regarded in the past (Sayed, 2001:51). A common reason in support of this view is the practise of employing housemaids who now perform the maternal duties that mothers or grandmothers used to in the past. They felt that these days maternal responsibilities have been voluntarily handed over to the housemaid.

A mixture of moral beliefs and values about the inherent nature of females held by the family affects the movements and activities of the girl child. Attitudes are however changing amongst the younger generation UAE nationals. According to a survey done by Sayed (2001:50) both male and female college students did not think that women should avoid public places nor were they opposed to women speaking in public. Extended family ties are weakening as is evident by the high divorce rates in the UAE. This also means that social support that comes from extended families also weakens. As a result, women are becoming more autonomous and are facing more burdens alone. In this regard

education provides some measure of independence even though social services from the government are available for nationals.

2.3.3 Education

Education was seen as a priority in the different Emirates prior to the confederation. In 1954 the Emirate of Sharjah began to educate its children. In 1959, Sheikh Rashid Al-Maktoum of Dubai initiated four schools (two girls' schools and two boys' schools). The first (exclusively) girls' school began in Abu Dhabi in 1967 (Sayed, 2001:53). The UAE has virtually eradicated illiteracy among women and girls under the age of forty-five. In 1977, during the development of the UAE University (UAEU), H.H. Sheikh Zayed initiated separate male and female institutions of higher learning. Several people recalled the effort that the President put into convincing citizens to send their daughters to the UAEU. This included many telephonic communications, provision of covered buses, guarded residences and catered food. People protested, "Why should girls go to university?" "What, is she going to go to work with men?" and "Who is going to teach them, young men?" (Sayed, 2001:53). So the faculty and staff chosen for the women's section of UAEU in 1977 consisted of some women and many very old men.

The faculty demographics at UAEU have changed since that time. There are now three government institutions offering fully government funded post-secondary education, as well as several private universities that offer virtually every discipline to women (Sayed, 2001:53). During the 2001 academic year, 95% of female high school graduates went on to pursue higher education in contrast to 75% of their male counterparts (Goudsouzian, 2001:1). The lower male enrolment rate is of concern in the UAE and in 2001 an attempt was made at "introducing a gender discriminatory university admissions policy" (Goudsouzian, 2001:1-2). Protest by UAE national females and intervention by H.H. Sheikha Fatima bint Mubarak wife of H.H. Sheikh Zayed resulted in the termination of this policy. According to this policy female applicants had to score an average of 70% in their secondary school examinations while male counterparts required only 60%. The reason given to justify the controversial admissions policy was the male to female ratio in

the UAE where women outnumber men. The reasons for the high female enrolment rates include:

- The male to female ratio where women outnumber men;
- Women are harder working and more committed to their studies (Al-Sari as cited by Goudsouzian, 2001:2);
- All university tuition is paid for by the state;
- All books, stationery and study material are provided at no cost to the student; and
- Students may work and study, in which case they are paid a salary while studying.

National women have an equal opportunity to study in the discipline of their choice. They are also being sent abroad to study at Western universities, but they are always chaperoned. Perhaps the greatest accomplishment has been the change in attitude towards education of girls amongst UAE citizens. The attitude and opinion survey conducted by Sayed (2001:54) reveals that 97% of males and 99% of females believe that it is important to educate women. Some participants explained that it is important to educate women so that they will be able to raise, teach and help their children and that it would help women to contribute to their country (Sayed, 2001:54). According to Sayed (2001:54), while women were thinking of education in terms of a career and employment opportunities, men viewed education as a woman's right and an opportunity for personal development. It was also shown by Sayed (2001:54) that females felt that their field of study should equip them for active economic participation in the public sphere. The male viewpoint differed in that they thought that the fields women should study must contribute to their competence in the private sphere. This view of males is very important because it presupposes a domestic role for females and not one in which they will enter the workplace.

Even while educational opportunities abound for national women and many are pursuing further studies in a variety of fields, they still have not entered the workplace in high

numbers. There are many reasons given for the relatively slow entry into, and the weak retention of UAE national women in the workforce. According to Al-Khateeb (1994:64), these include:

- Social status is measured by the amount of leisure time a woman has;
- A woman is not required by society, tradition or religion to contribute financially to the family. Responsibility for financial support of family lies with men;
- Economic prosperity has lessened the need for women to work;
- High school and university students have not been advised on appropriate disciplines of study to pursue;
- Some women cease working after marriage;
- Some women cease working after having children; and
- The UAE is a young country and women are only now entering the workforce.

Both males and females agreed in the study conducted by Sayed (2001:68) that the family suffers when a woman is not home. However, at the same time, females did not think that family should be an inhibitor to female participation in the workforce. There was a belief amongst females that sacrifices on the part of the family should be expected and tolerated when the mother is working outside the home (Sayed, 2001:68). Not surprisingly, male students disagreed with this notion (Sayed, 2001:68).

Regarding segregation in the workplace, female college students felt that women should not avoid working with men, while males thought that women should avoid occupations in which males are employed (Sayed, 2001:69). This may be due to the Islamic responsibility of males to protect females and the cultural prohibition of females interacting with non-related males. National males also realise that working in integrated work environments may encourage relationships to develop between national females and non-national males causing problems with the arranged marriage status quo, which is part of UAE culture. While women are slowly entering into male dominated fields, cursory

observation of work environments as well as interviews indicate that communication barriers between males and females exist in the workplace (Sayed, 2001:69). These barriers constrain working relationships and reduce the participation of women in group discussions involved in decision-making (Sayed, 2001:69). There is evidence of women being involved indirectly in public policy decisions through the male members of their family or through women's associations.

In a society where polygynous marriages are acceptable, it was in the past, difficult to locate a single woman in her mid to late twenties. However, now that more women are opting for higher education, many forfeit marriage because after their studies they are of an unmarriageable age or because a higher education is not acceptable to prospective grooms. Therefore, it is now possible to encounter single national women, "a phenomenon that would have not existed in this area fifteen to twenty years ago" (Soffan, 1980:96).

2.3.4 The single woman

This current generation of women has experienced by far the most societal change. Having benefited from the oil wealth, not only do they want more than what their parents had, but their parents have great aspirations for them as well. By living out their youth and having opportunities to study and travel abroad, single women return with other views of life and though they are intent on marrying a local man, their married life may not be completely traditional. Many want to start their own businesses or pursue careers as well as raise a family.

About ten years ago, it was primarily single women who were the vanguard of change. They were the first to be educated and to enter the workforce before it became socially acceptable for women to work. Society has responded positively to their needs through government mandatory education laws and the provision of official encouragement for women's career pursuits. It is likely that single women will continue to be the leaders of fundamental societal change as they forge ahead in their educational and professional

pursuits. Later, when these women are married the upbringing of their own families will reflect their new and transformed attitudes on life in general. An article in the Gulf News (Staff Reporter, 2003a:2) discusses a memorandum submitted by national female advocates to the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs. In this memorandum, the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs is asked to amend articles in the personal status draft law as it had a negative effect on women's rights. These articles involve engagement, marriage contract, dowry, divorce, trusteeship, pregnancy and maintenance amongst others.

The memorandum, for example, objects to Article 19 of the personal status law regarding the marriage contract, which states that, "the responsibility of the household goes to the husband" (Staff Reporter, 2003a:2). These advocates believe that the household must be a joint responsibility. They expressed reservations about Article 30 of the personal status law, which sets the age of adolescence at fifteen years. The memorandum proposes that this (the age of adolescence) be set at eighteen years as it is the minimum age at which both sexes are eligible to marry (Staff Reporter, 2003a:2). They assert that Article 56 of the personal status law, which makes the wife responsible for supervising household affairs, contradicts the "soul and spirit of the marriage contract" (Staff Reporter, 2003a:2). In addition, the memorandum opposes Article 62 of the personal status law, which states that a working wife shall pay the wages of the housemaid because this obligation contradicts the rights and obligations of the couple as stated in *Shariah Law* (Staff Reporter, 2003a:2).

As increasing numbers of educated women speak out and display to other women their courage in participating in the nation-building process, more women will undoubtedly come forward and use their acquired knowledge and skills. In this context, there is no fear of violating Islamic tenets as neither learning nor working is denied for women in Islam. In addition, the UAE Government supports national women where, "guarantees for women have been written into legislation" (Abdelkarim, 2001:148) and they are included in the nationalisation (Emiratisation) process instituted by the UAE government by UAE Cabinet Decree Number 10/98 (Emiratisation) effective from 1999.

2.4 EMIRATISATION

Emiratisation is a multi-level process through which dependency on the expatriate labour force is reduced and UAE nationals are prepared to take up jobs previously performed by expatriates. Such preparation entails enabling UAE nationals to perform their jobs equally well, if not better than, expatriates (Section 1.6). The UAE government is a latecomer to the process of nationalisation, which has already been instituted in all Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states. This policy has been developed because these economies are dependent on a majority expatriate workforce. Therefore, an affirmative action or nationalisation policy ensures job opportunities for nationals who are in competition with foreign workers.

Table 2.1 shows that the UAE economy is largely dependent on expatriate manpower with nationals contributing only 9.1% to the total labour force. It is interesting to note that female participation increased substantially during this period from approximately 1 000 in 1975 to more than 15 000 in 1995 signifying an annual growth rate of 14.3% compared to a rate of 4.5% for the national male contribution to the labour force. In addition, a comparison of the educational status between the sexes reveals that in 1995, 47% of economically active national females had a university degree compared to 11.8% of the economically active national males (Abdelkarim, 2001:23).

TABLE 2.1: CHANGES IN THE LABOUR FORCE (1975-1995) BY SEX AND NATIONALITY GROUP

	1975			1985			1995		
	F	**M**	**T**	**F**	**M**	**T**	**F**	**M**	**T**
Total Labour Force	9 803 5.1%	283 395 94.9%	193 788 100%	65 415 9.6%	618 410 90.4%	683 825 100%	155 790 11.7%	1 180 104 88.3%	1 335 894 100%
UAE Nationals	1 086 2.4%	43 545	44 631 15.2%	3 997 5.9%	64 322	68 319 10%	15 729 13%	105 562	121 291 9.1%
Expatriates	8 717	240 440	249 157 84.8%	61 418	554 088	615 506 90%	140 061	1 074 524	1 214 603 90.9%

Notes: F= Female; M=Male; T=Total

Source: MOP (1997:12)

Since the institution of Emiratisation in 1999, slow progress has been noted as "nationals still struggle to find adequate employment opportunities even though they constitute a small minority of the total labour force" (Abdelkarim, 2001:3). According to Abdelkarim (2001:4), if foreign and national labour forces growth follows past patterns, the predicted statistics for the year 2015 would be as indicated in Table 2.2.

TABLE 2.2: NATIONAL AND NON-NATIONAL LABOUR FORCE (1991-2015) SIMULATION BASED ON EXTRAPOLATION OF PAST TRENDS IN DEFICIT RATIO

Participants	**Numbers**	**%**
National Labour Force	435 791	8.3
Expatriate Labour Force	4 836 869	91.7
Total Labour Force	5 272 660	100

Source: extracted from Abdelkarim (2001:4)

Table 2.2 shows that nationals will continue to suffer a high unemployment rate if policies are not instituted to initiate more participation of nationals in the UAE economy.

This means that the vision of the development of a future post-oil economic strategy would remain a mere dream for the UAE. The difficulties experienced in placing UAE national graduates in the workforce and projections like these have forced government intervention. An article in Gulf News (Rao, 2003:1) indicates that, in the future, various sectors will be required by law to employ UAE nationals. At present the UAE banking sector has been given a quota forcing them to employ nationals. If appropriate policy measures like these are introduced and more active female participation is encouraged, then it is predicted by Abdelkarim (2001:4) that nationals could command 20% of the labour force by 2015.

A consideration of national labour force patterns indicates an unbalanced structure. Table 2.3 shows that the majority of UAE nationals worked primarily for the public sector with the government employing 63.1% nationals in 1995. According to data in Table 2.3, the number of nationals employed by the government comprised 48.3% in the federal government and 14.8% in the local government sector. The local government sector did not appear to have provided similar job opportunities for nationals compared to federal government even though jobs in the local government exceeded those available in the federal government by 14.6%. Representation of nationals was even less in the mixed and public sector where only 28.4% of all jobs within them were occupied by nationals.

In essence, the majority of the national labour force was employed in 1995 by the government (federal and local), the public and the mixed sectors. This means that the majority of jobs in private sector were occupied by expatriate workers, indicating a preference for the public sector by national workers. Reasons provided for this preference include favourable salaries, working conditions and guaranteed promotions.

TABLE 2.3: NATIONAL AND TOTAL LABOUR FORCE DISTRIBUTION BY ECONOMIC SECTOR IN 1995 GROUP

Economic Sector	Nationals		Total
	Number	**Percentage of Total**	

Federal Government	72 880	48.3 %	150 865
Local Government	25 601	14.8%	172 857
Public Sector	2 467	17.6%	14 011
Mixed Sector	4 196	10.8%	38 805
Private Establishments	9 108	1.3%	695 794
Other Establishments	289	4.5%	6 366
Without Establishment	1 992	16.5%	120 820
Abroad	201	1.02%	19 680
Private (Domestic Services)	424	0.4%	104 366
Not Stated	94	29.5%	319
Unemployed (never worked before)	4 039	39.6%	10 211
TOTAL	121 291	9.1%	1 335 899

Source: MOP (1997:15)

Table 2.4 below shows that UAE national females comprised 12 462 (36%) of the total number of employees in the MOEY while national males constituted only 4 562 (13%) in 2001. Although the health sector is traditionally female dominated, in the UAE, lower numbers of national males (1 840) and national females (1 780) work in this field. The high numbers of nationals in the public sector does indicate some success of nationalisation. However, according to Abdelkarim (2001:8), the number of nationals and particularly women in public service employment could be increased substantially by increasing their absolute numbers at a faster rate and through raising their productivity. Therefore, increased participation rates among women is expected to continue for two reasons, namely:

- Surveys show that national households are not against their daughters entering the labour market (UAEU, 1997); and

- Women in the UAE are performing better than men in education with past trends showing that with higher educational attainment UAE national women are entering the labour force in higher numbers and at a faster rate.

TABLE 2.4: DISTRIBUTION OF FEDERAL GOVERNMENT EMPLOYEES BY SEX AND EMPLOYER

Employer	Total	Expatriates		UAE Nationals	
		F	M	F	M
Education and Youth	36 116	7 453	11 639	12 462	4 562
Health	13 230	4 810	4 800	1 780	1 840
Information and Culture	435	16	141	77	201
Interior	351	4	160	75	112
Electricity and Water	73	1	28	12	32
Public Works and Housing	515	3	136	96	280
Agriculture & Fisheries	1 005	0	264	29	712
Communications	158	5	74	21	58
Foreign Affairs	299	7	104	62	126
Justice	1 224	40	536	65	583
Labour and Social Affairs	1 378	44	221	538	575
Finance and Industry	554	28	253	101	172
State for Cabinet Affairs	272	17	115	53	87
Planning	158	3	72	21	62
Economics and Commerce	183	3	48	38	94
Petroleum and Mineral Resources	58	4	25	7	22
Premiership and Deputy	81	1	40	0	40
State for Supreme Council Affairs	14	1	8	2	3
Protocol Dept	282	1	213	4	64
Higher Education	64	1	26	24	13
TOTAL	**56 450**	**12 442**	**18 903**	**15 467**	**9 638**

Notes: F= Female and M=Male

Source: MOP Website (2003 – Table 3_22)

In order to nationalise the currently dominant expatriate workforce, human resource development was given priority in the form of different government development plans, which are clearly reflected by the unprecedented expansion in the education sector at all

levels. As a result, increasing numbers of UAE nationals have entered the labour market. In an effort to further promote the human resource development drive, the government also focused on the creation of specialised federal and local institutions. These institutions like the National Human Resource Development and Employment Authority (TANMIA), which started its activities in November 2000, support the formulation and implementation of development initiatives and programs. TANMIA is a specialised federal institution with the objective of aiding the development and employment of UAE nationals. TANMIA functions as an employment center, with a mission to develop the abilities of nationals and increase their participation in the workforce. To achieve this mission, TANMIA works with national job seekers by supplying employment information, career advice and training.

Women's participation in the workforce is increasing and more effort is being made to encourage female employment. Employed national females are presently concentrated in the service sector. Although much more career diversification is expected, their dominance in the education sector suggests opportunities for career advancement and leadership. Employment into the private school sector may be viewed as another opportunity to secure employment for female national educators, as the government sector becomes saturated.

2.5 CONCLUSION

A historical perspective of the UAE provides the basis for an understanding of the position and status of UAE national women in their society. The introduction of Islam brought about changes in society and also an improvement in the status of women. Gradual erosion of the status of women occurred because of cultural and social factors. It is confirmed that the primary role of women in UAE society is that of care-giver, but changes are expected as national women become increasingly educated and as their society continues to accept the roles of women as *working mother* and *career woman*. At present the number of national women in the overall workforce is low, however, their entrance into the workforce is increasing (13% in 1995 as shown in Table 2.1). National

women were found to be employed predominantly in the public sector, particularly in education. Their dominance in this sector suggests a niche for national women to develop their careers and assume leadership roles.

The next chapter provides a literature review of changes in labour market patterns for women generally and in the education sector in particular. An overview of the strategies employed by other countries to help women overcome barriers is included. In addition, leadership styles related to the "ways women lead" (Rosener, 1990) in a changing educational environment are examined.