

The Impact of Social Change Theories on Women's Roles in Emirati Urban Society: Reassessing Modernization through the Emirati Experience

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Abstract- The swift transition of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from a tribal and agrarian society into a cosmopolitan, globalized, and knowledge-based economy has resulted in significant shifts in the social, economic, educational, political, and familial roles of women. This paper will explore these changes using the theoretical framework of modernization while also taking into consideration dependency, post-colonialism, feminist, and gender theories in order to determine how far the existing theories of social change account for the experiences of Emiratis. Utilizing an integrative review of academic articles, historical sources, and UAE official policy documents, the paper will analyze the changes in women's participation in education, workforce, entrepreneurship, political decision-making, leadership positions, family life, and urban public spaces. It will be shown that modernization theory offers considerable explanatory power when it comes to the connection between economic and social development, urbanization, education, occupational diversification, technology, and evolving gender roles (Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Lerner, 1958). However, the UAE example calls into question linear models of modernization since women's empowerment has not merely been achieved through individualization brought about by market dynamics and the decline of traditional cultural values. On the contrary, the role transition of women has largely been enabled by state intervention, financial affluence due to oil resources, diversification of the economy, globalization, development of education systems, and gender-related institutional policy (Khalaf, 2006; Moghadam, 2003; United Arab Emirates Government, 2023). Moreover, contemporary studies have shown that Emirati women today practice negotiation rather than rejection of collectivist culture values, combining economic and professional power with family ties and cultural identity (Alteneiji, 2023; Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2021). This paper thus suggests a contextually developed model of Culturally Embedded

State-Led Modernization (CESLM), where structural transformations, institutional intervention, and cultural negotiation interplay to transform the role of women. The paper will contribute to existing literature on gender, modernization, urbanization, and social transformation in Gulf societies, as modernization does not necessarily imply cultural values displacement but can be selectively adopted and reinterpreted.

Keywords: Emirati women; modernization theory; social change; urbanization; gender roles; United Arab Emirates; women's empowerment; globalization; Gulf societies; state-led modernization.

I. INTRODUCTION

One of the most prominent instances of the rapid socioeconomic transformation in the contemporary Middle East is the case of the United Arab Emirates. Since the emergence of the UAE as a federation in 1971, there have been drastic alterations in the economic system of the country, urban landscape, education, employment, governmental institutions, and social intercourse. The exploitation of oil reserves has created the conditions for state building and infrastructure development. Economic diversification has turned the country into an internationally integrated economy which includes finance, tourism, logistics, education, technology, real estate, and knowledge-based industries (Khalaf, 2006; O'Sullivan, 2008; Yousef, 2004). Such dramatic changes have had a considerable impact on gender relations. Now women do not only perform household and communal duties but also receive higher education, become professionals in various fields, start their own businesses, work in

governmental institutions, participate in politics, engage in scientific and technological innovations, and even take the leading positions in organizations (Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Lerner, 1958). Nonetheless, analysis of the transformation of Emirati women solely using modernization theory faces problems on a theoretical level. The classical perspective on modernization theory usually viewed social development as a transition from traditional to modern societies, where modernization was defined by factors such as urbanization, industrialization, secularization, individualization, and differentiation of social institutions (Lerner, 1958; Parsons, 1951; Rostow, 1960). This approach has been criticized for taking Western industrial societies as the implicit end point of development. The UAE represents an important case in which this presumption is not applicable. Modernization of the economy and institutions is present together with the importance of family solidarity, cultural identity, Islamic values, kinship ties, and collectivism. Therefore, the growth of education, employment, and leadership roles of women does not necessarily indicate the abandonment of traditional cultural structures. Emirati women seem to navigate in socially meaningful cultural relations (Alteneiji, 2023; Samier, 2015). Evidence of this transformation can be found from recent intergenerational studies. According to Alteneiji (2023), there were substantial differences in attitudes towards gender equality, education, work, marriage, career, and domestic chores in three generations of Emirati women. At the same time, family ties were a significant aspect of women's social identity. Such change and continuity in Emirati society indicate that modernization in the UAE does not entail the complete transformation of gender roles and loss of traditional social institutions. Role transformations of women can be associated with the state's policy. The government of the UAE has introduced policies that focus on increasing women's involvement in education, labor market, management, entrepreneurship, and future economic fields. The National Policy for Empowerment of Emirati Women 2023-2031 emphasizes empowerment of women as an economic and social issue while at the same time stressing family support (United Arab Emirates Government, 2023). Thus, gender equality is institutionalized as part of national

development and not left to the results of spontaneous processes.

This leads to an interesting theoretical question:

What role does modernization theory play in explaining the transformation of the roles of women in contemporary Emirati urban society and what is needed instead in order to understand Emirati experience?

The paper analyzes the interaction between urbanization, education, employment, entrepreneurship, state policies, globalization, family relationships, and agency of women. The main thesis is that modernization theory is useful but not enough. In the Emirati context, there is a unique example of state-initiated and culturally rooted modernization in which modern institutions and empowerment of women coexist with some aspects of collectivist family culture. Instead of gradual transformation from tradition to modernity as we know it in Western countries, Emirati society created a unique combination of modern institutions within the framework of the existing culture.

II. BACKGROUND: EMIRATI SOCIETY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF WOMEN'S ROLES

2.1 From Traditional Economy to Global Urban Society

Before the discovery of oil and the creation of the UAE, productive activities of women were linked with the economy of the family house, agriculture, handicrafts, commerce, and other subsistence productions. The productive activity of women was not limited to a simple dichotomy of public/private spheres, but it was embedded into gendered family and community structures. The discovery and exploitation of oil resources led to the transformation of the socioeconomic structure of the Gulf region. The money earned from oil made it possible for the government to form modern institutions, build infrastructure, offer education and healthcare services, and create public sector labor marketplaces (Khalaf, 2006; O'Sullivan, 2008; Yousef, 2004). The process was accompanied by rapid urbanization. Gulf cities have become complex metropolitan

environments connected to global movement of capital, labor force, technologies, information, and cultures. As Khalaf (2006) notes, the current Gulf city is characterized by the interplay of oil, globalization, migration, and modernization. Urban transformation also changed the spaces where women could interact. Universities, governments, hospitals, corporations, culture houses, technological houses, and entrepreneur ecosystems provided an opportunity for women to get into spaces that were not open before. Nonetheless, urban transformation was not socially neutral. Gender was very much entrenched in family, occupational and cultural relations. Urban transformation, thus, created both opportunities and tensions for women.

2.2 Changing Gender Roles

The transformation of Emirati women's roles can be understood across several interconnected dimensions that reflect the broader social, economic, and institutional changes experienced by the United Arab Emirates. These transformations include the expansion of women's educational participation and the growth of their professional employment across diverse sectors of the economy. Emirati women have also increasingly engaged in entrepreneurship and have gained greater opportunities to participate in political and institutional decision-making. Their increased representation in leadership positions has further strengthened their visibility and influence within public and professional institutions. At the same time, women's greater visibility in urban public spaces reflects changing patterns of mobility, social participation, and public engagement. These developments have been accompanied by changing attitudes toward marriage and family, the emergence of stronger professional identities, and the renegotiation of household responsibilities. Collectively, these changes demonstrate that the transformation of Emirati women's roles involves not only increased participation in education and employment but also a broader reconfiguration of gender relations within family, workplace, institutional, and urban contexts. These transformations reflect various dimensions of modernization described by both classical and modern scholars (Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Lerner, 1958). However, gender

transformation cannot be viewed merely as a result of modernization process. Gender dynamics depend on the institutional context, social hierarchy, culture, and negotiation between family members and organizations (Connell & Pearse, 2015; Kandiyoti, 1988; Moghadam, 2003). Such an approach is especially relevant for the UAE due to the fact that women's participation in professional activities takes place in a society where familial relationships have high significance.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Modernization Theory

Modernization theory came to prominence in post Second World War social science as an effort to understand social and economic modernization. Modernization was seen by Lerner (1958), Parsons (1951) and Rostow (1960) as a comprehensive phenomenon, which included economic development, urbanization, institutional differentiation, education, occupational specialization and changes in social values.

Lerner (1958) stressed the connections between urbanization, literacy, media contact and modern institution membership. Rostow (1960) saw economic development as a process of moving through stages of economic development. Parsons (1951) saw modernization as the increasing differentiation and complexity of social institutions. Subsequent modernization research went beyond the economic structures to include the role of values and culture. Inglehart and Norris (2003) and Inglehart and Welzel (2005) argue that socioeconomic development is linked with value transformations, which include the rise in importance of individual autonomy, gender equality, participation and self expression. From the gender perspective, there are various mechanisms through which modernization may affect the position of women.

Firstly, economic development provides more employment options. Second, urbanization increases access to educational and professional institutions. Third, educational expansion increases women's human capital. Fourth, employment can increase women's economic agency and bargaining power.

Fifth, exposure to new social environments can contribute to changing attitudes concerning gender. The resulting pathway can be expressed as:

Economic transformation → Urbanization → Educational expansion → Employment → Economic agency → Changing gender norms → Greater public participation

This sequence provides a useful starting point for understanding the UAE.

3.2 Modernization and Women's Status

The connection between modernization and women's empowerment cannot be reduced to economics alone. Women's social status is defined by the interaction between economic structures, family arrangements, culture, institutions, and gender ideologies. Boserup (1970), one of the early writers on the topic, has shown that economic development does not automatically lead to either positive or negative outcomes for women. Economic change can generate new job opportunities and, at the same time, reconfigure production relations so as to marginalize women's economic contributions. So, according to Moghadam (2003), understanding women's status in the Middle Eastern countries requires looking at the interactions between economic changes, state institutions, family structures, and gender regimes. For example, in the Arab world, women's labor force is determined by such factors as human capital, institutions, and gender ideologies, but at the same time it continues to depend on other structural determinants (Fakih & Ghazalian, 2013). Thus, the connection between modernization and women's empowerment is much more complex than assumed in the initial premise.

3.3 Gender Theory and the Negotiation of Women's Roles

The concept of modernization theory is not enough to understand the power structures and the process through which changes in gender roles occur. Although modernization theory offers valuable insights into the structural changes taking place due to urbanization, education, diversification of economy, and greater women's involvement in the workforce, there is the possibility of overlooking the

role of gender relationships in families, at workplaces, and through institutions and cultural practices. Gender theory thus becomes another angle to understand how Emirati women construct and respond to change. This is because rather than assuming that modernization of the economy and society will naturally lead to equality between genders, the gender approach brings in the focus the process through which women's identity and agency emerge.

Gender is understood by Connell and Pearse (2015) as a social structure that functions through institutions, identity, practice, and relations between people. Thus, from this perspective, gender is not only an attribute of individuals or cultural prescriptions but also a process of continuous production and reproduction of gender relations within social structures and institutions. The idea of gender regimes introduced by Connell (2005) shows that gender relations are organized by institutions through patterns of power, labor, emotions, and symbols. The concept is especially valuable when applied to the study of Emirati society since the growth of women's involvement in education, work, business, and leadership does not eliminate the persistence of traditional gender expectations.

The simultaneous presence of the opportunity of change and expectations that do not change indicates that the transformation in the status of women in this country has to be viewed through the prism of bargaining, not as a simple replacement of old roles by new ones. The concept of "bargaining with patriarchy" proposed by Kandiyoti (1988) is very useful for understanding this process. In her opinion, women have some possibilities of developing agency in the existing patriarchal structure and not being satisfied with it or openly opposing it. Thus, women bargain with the expectations that are put on them and find possibilities to get access to education, work, money, social mobility or independence without breaking important relations.

The idea of "bargaining with patriarchy" is very important for the description of the Emirati situation because the progress of women took place in the society which was rapidly transforming economically

and socially but keeping such values as the importance of family, kinship, cultural identity and social links at the same time. Therefore, agency of Emirati women is exercised in many different ways. For example, a woman may go in for higher education and professional activity at the same time as she remains committed to her family and fulfills the expectations put on wife and mother. Indeed, recent research in Emirati women's studies shows that family, social networks, and culture continue to be relevant factors for educational and career decisions, and that women are constructing professional identities and claiming legitimacy at the workplace (Alteneiji, 2023; Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2021).

Gender theories will help us understand the difference between formal equality and substantive transformation. The development of women's access to education, work, management, and politics has been an important institutional transformation in many countries. However, whether these transformations affect the gender structure of everyday life depends on redistribution of responsibilities and expectations in family and organization settings. Increased participation in the labor market, although providing female workers with economic independence and professional status, may produce conflict due to persistence of association between care activities and women. The evidence from Emirati universities shows that women administrators might suffer work-family conflicts even while gaining prominence in professional careers. This example shows that women's progress both in the private and professional spheres can happen in tandem with continued pressure related to their domestic duties.

The idea of gender regimes becomes useful in order to analyze this seeming paradox. The process of modernization results in increased support of institutions for women's participation while family traditions and social expectations change slower. Thus, modernization does not eliminate gender structures, but transforms the environment in which these structures exist. In case of Emirati women, state policies encouraging women's education, employment, entrepreneurship, and leadership were accompanied by their active reinterpretation and

assimilation in the personal and family life. Indeed, this approach fits well with the existing information on the intergenerational shift in the attitudes of Emirati women. For instance, Alteneiji (2023) found significant intergenerational shifts in attitudes towards gender equality, careers, marriage, and family relations. Emirati women of younger generations are generally more egalitarian and ambitious career-wise than their older counterparts; however, family ties remain an important aspect of their identities and social lives. In such a way, the traditional dichotomy of tradition versus modernity becomes questionable, and Emirati women are shown to build hybrid identities, where professional aspirations, individuality, family values, and culture are compatible with each other.

Thus, gender theories provide an opportunity to step away from the idea that women's empowerment is merely a consequence of the process of modernization. It can be assumed that changes in the women's roles happen due to the complex interaction of economic changes, institutions, cultural norms, and individual initiatives. Economic and urban development may provide some opportunities, but women negotiate their options in the existing gender regime. Hence, gender role transformations are seen as a multidirectional and dynamic process during which women adapt to changes and produce them.

In this way, Emirati women should not be seen as mere products of modernization or people who undergo a transition from "traditional" to "modern" identities. They need to be perceived as active agents of the transformation of Emirati society. Participation in education, labor market, entrepreneurship, political leadership and public life contributes to institutional and social changes; at the same time, active involvement in family and cultural context shows that modernization can be achieved through adaptation and negotiation instead of cultural abandonments. Thus, the Emirati experience supports the idea that social changes can be conceptualized in a more nuanced way as mutual interaction of modernization and gender transformation. Thus, this study views the role transition among Emirati women as a negotiated process of modernization. Modernization in terms of economy and institutions increases the structure of

opportunities available for women, while the gender relation, family expectations and cultural norms help them interpret and make use of such opportunities. The agency of women takes place within this framework and helps women negotiate the identities of professionals, family members and socially. Unlike the traditional modernization approach where the identity of family member and professional is considered to be mutually exclusive categories, this model sees that Emirati women can create and sustain these identities through negotiation.

3.4 Feminist and Intersectional Perspectives

Moreover, feminist critique has contested mainstream theories of development and modernization for reducing women into a monolithic social category and for presuming that advancements in terms of economic development are equivalent to empowerment for all women. Contrariwise, feminist theory focuses on the fact that women's experience is mediated by complex systems of power, institutions, identities and economic structures. Crenshaw's (1989) notion of intersectionality is critical for this reason as it highlights the idea that gender should not be considered in isolation from other social identity categories and forms of inequality. Women's chances and constraints are created by gender's interactions with factors such as nationality, citizenship, class, ethnicity, profession, age, and institutional status. Thus, any analysis of women's increasing participation should account for both whether women are taking part in educational, economic and political life of the country, and for which women these changes bring about benefits and under what conditions and what institutional arrangements.

An intersectional approach is particularly useful for the United Arab Emirates because the country's demographic and socioeconomic profile is very different from many other countries. The country is known for its high level of globalization, fast pace of urbanization, high proportion of expatriate population, and unique citizenship-based state institutions. The Emiratis represent the minority within the total number of population in the country whereas women from different national, ethnic and socioeconomic background actively take part in the labor market and other institutional domains of

society. This means that when one refers to the category "women in the UAE," he/she addresses a group of people whose legal, economic, social and institutional standing may vary significantly. In this framework, Emirati women as citizens have their own unique institutional and social standing. Citizenship provides access to certain state institutions, education, job opportunities, welfare system, and development processes of the state which may not necessarily be available to foreign women in the same way. Therefore, it is important to consider the Emirati women's role transformation from the perspective of the link between citizenship and state development processes. The increase in women's engagement in the education, job market, entrepreneurship, leadership and policymaking has been supported by national policies and initiatives aimed at increasing the number of Emirati women involved in the process of the country's development. In such a way, the Emirati case is unique when compared with the situation of expatriate women whose social and economic situation is largely determined by migration status, segmentation of the labor market, contract-based employment and transnational family relationships.

However, such difference does not mean that there is a homogeneous group of Emirati women. It is also necessary to consider intersectionality from the perspective of differences among Emirati women themselves. Factors such as age, level of education, marital status, socioeconomic background, geographical place of residence, occupation and generation may play an important role in shaping social change for women. For instance, young and highly educated Emirati women who start their professional career and entrepreneurship may face other challenges and social norms than the ones which were faced by older generations socialized in a different economic and institutional environment. Alteneiji (2023) illustrates this through analysis of change in attitudes towards gender roles, profession, marriage and families across three generations of Emirati women. Intersectionality undermines the traditional view of the dichotomy between tradition and modernity. Modernization theory views women's movement toward higher education, paid employment, and political roles as the proof of

transformation of traditional to modern relations. Intersectional feminist scholarship questions the above view by raising questions regarding the experience of change by the women themselves. One woman can be at the same time a professional, an entrepreneur, a daughter, wife, mother, and a member of the community. None of these identities contradict each other. Rather, all these roles can be performed together in a particular combination in the particular context. Therefore, the experience of professional success along with family obligations and commitment can be observed with respect to the experience of Emirati women.

As Benería et al. (2015) also argue, gender and development need to be studied in the context of interaction between economic structure, globalization, labor markets, and institutions. In this case, women's empowerment cannot be limited to only increasing their labor-force participation or level of education. The quality of employment, women's involvement in decision-making positions, economic independence, resource control, family-work relationships, and the institutional setting of women's participation also matter. The latter is especially relevant in relation to the case of women in the UAE, which is characterized by rapid women's participation in the modern economy.

Moreover, the intersectional view can be helpful in understanding the concept of economic agency. It does not mean that women's employment or entrepreneurship results in economic agency identical in its nature. Women's economic agency can be generated by education, resources of the family, institutional environment, networks, capital, etc., but, at the same time, can be formed under the pressure of norms associated with the family role and reputation of the person. Studies of Emirati women entrepreneurs reveal that not only individual agency, but also social networks of families and society at large can become a source of women empowerment. At the same time, intersectionality is another tool through which one should interpret the relationship between the state-led empowerment and women's agency. Indeed, although the government can provide opportunities for women through its policies, such policies do not affect women in the same way. The

effects of state initiatives depend on the educational level of women, their occupations, family situation, social networks and labor market status. Thus, state-led modernization can create an enabling institutional environment without prescribing any particular route of women's emancipation. In their turn, women use the given opportunities to interpret and make sense of these policies in accordance with their social context. It is crucial to pay special attention to the distinction between Emirati citizens and expatriates. The current work will focus on Emirati women, who are viewed as a population characterized by dynamic roles connected with national development and state building. In other words, the present study does not assume that the outcomes achieved by Emirati women can be attributed to all women working and residing in the UAE. Expatriate women comprise a highly diverse group of female employees working in a wide range of sectors and affected by the differences in the regimes of migration and labor markets.

This point is also essential for theoretical reasons because this approach allows refining the argument proposed in the present study. It is impossible to apply the approach that views modernization as a process of uniform transition to one and the same outcome. The concept of intersectionality allows explaining why certain structural transformations have different effects on various groups of women. The combination of perspectives of modernization, gender relations, feminist theories, and intersectionality helps to provide a holistic explanation of the role transformation of Emirati women. Modernization theory takes into account macro-processes related to economic diversification, urbanization, education, and institutional development. Gender perspective focuses on gender relations in institutions and families. Feminist perspectives emphasize the issues of power and agency in general and the experiences of women in particular, whereas the intersectionality allows us to understand that women experience these processes differently depending on their social and institutional position. Thus, the use of these perspectives allows not to regard women's emancipation as a by-product of modernization.

In such a way, the current paper will examine the role transformation of Emirati women as a multi-dimensional and socially stratified phenomenon. Emirati women achieve increasing visibility in educational, professional, entrepreneurial, and leadership sectors, as well as in public institutions. However, it occurs in the context of family and cultural institutions and traditions. In such a way, the issue of women's role transformation should not be discussed in the terms of the transition from tradition to modernity and the process of Western-style individualization of Emirati women. On the contrary, Emirati women negotiate their opportunities and identity in the course of reproduction of existing social and cultural relations.

3.5 Dependency and Postcolonial Perspectives

A dependency approach serves as an essential critique of modernization theory. Instead of defining development as a linear process of transition from traditional to modern societies, dependency theories focus on the unequal relations between core and peripheral economies and the structure of global capitalism. Using dependency theory, the sudden change of the Gulf region may be explained through its involvement in the global system of oil production, finance, trade, migration, and labor relations. The urban landscape of the UAE is fully integrated in the global circuits of capital, technology, expertise, and migrant workers (Castells, 2010; Khalaf, 2006). In that regard, the process of economic development has not happened in vacuum in terms of global political-economic structures. Postcolonial theories warn against treating non-Western societies as unfinished Western modern societies. Said (1978)'s criticism of Orientalism illustrates how the knowledge systems of the West historically constructed the Middle East based on the dichotomy between modernity and tradition. It is especially relevant for gender issues. Empowerment of Emirati women cannot be treated as an "Westernization". It is crucial to analyze the new role

of women in their own political, cultural, and institutional context.

IV. METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design

Modernization theory will be evaluated in its capability to explain transformations in women's roles in the UAE within an approach that integrates various viewpoints from dependency theory, feminist theory, gender studies, and postcolonialism. The study is not designed to establish primary evidence regarding causality. Rather, it reviews existing literature to develop a context-specific conceptual framework.

4.2 Sources

Four major groups of sources are used in this analysis:

1. theoretical sources on modernization and social change;
2. contemporary research on gender, development, and globalization;
3. research related specifically to Emirati women and Gulf region; and
4. documents from the Government and other institutions of the UAE related to the issue of gender equality and female empowerment.

Foundational theories were selected because they constitute the theoretical basis of modernization, dependency, gender and social change. Contemporary literature was preferred wherever possible.

4.3 Analytical Dimensions

The literature was organized around six dimensions:

Dimension	Modernization mechanism	Transformation in women's roles
Urbanization	Expansion of cities and institutions	Increased access to public and professional spaces
Education	Human-capital development	Increased qualifications and aspirations
Employment	Occupational diversification	Greater economic agency

Dimension	Modernization mechanism	Transformation in women's roles
Entrepreneurship	Market participation	Individual and collective empowerment
Political participation	Institutional modernization	Greater representation in decision-making
Family relations	Changing social expectations	Negotiation of traditional and egalitarian roles

The analysis then assessed whether evidence from the UAE supports, modifies, or challenges modernization theory.

V. FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

5.1 Urbanization and Women's Public Presence

Urbanization represents one of the most important structural dimensions of Emirati social change.

The development of Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, and other urban centers has created extensive institutional environments in which women can participate in education, employment, government, entrepreneurship, culture, and professional networks. Khalaf (2006) describes the Gulf city as a product of the interaction between oil wealth, globalization, migration, and modernization. This urban transformation has expanded the physical and institutional spaces available to women.

Castells (2010) further highlights the significance of networked urban societies in which information, communication, and economic activities transcend traditional geographical boundaries. The UAE's highly connected urban environment provides Emirati women with access to national and transnational professional networks.

Urbanization therefore supports a central modernization proposition: structural transformation creates new social opportunities.

However, urbanization alone does not determine gender outcomes. Access to urban institutions remains mediated by family expectations, organizational cultures, gender norms, and state policies (Connell & Pearse, 2015; Kandiyoti, 1988).

The Emirati case therefore suggests that urbanization is a facilitating condition, rather than a sufficient cause, of changing gender roles.

5.2 Education as a Driver of Gender Transformation

Education stands out among the most powerful links between modernization and changes in women's societal roles.

The connection of education with social mobility, occupational differentiation, politics, and values was already noted by modernization scholars (Lerner, 1958; Inglehart & Welzel, 2005).

For the UAE case, the development of education has provided Emirati women with an opportunity to obtain professional qualifications and different types of jobs. Education in higher schools has resulted in the development of professional identities among Emirati women.

As Samier (2015) indicates, the process of forming the educational leadership of Emirati women is affected by a number of such factors as globalization, culture, religion, politics, and modernization. The result is significant since it means that education does not bring only external values but also becomes integrated into internal cultural context.

The intergenerational study of Alteneiji (2023) also supports this hypothesis. It is notable that there are considerable differences in grandmothers', mothers', and daughters' views about women's education, employment, gender equality, marriage, and housework.

Thus, the link can be shown as follows:

Education → Human capital → Professional opportunity → Economic agency → Changing gender expectations

However, education does not necessarily produce cultural detachment. Rather, educated Emirati women may reinterpret professional participation as compatible with family and national responsibilities.

5.3 Women's Employment and Economic Agency

Women's involvement in formal employment is yet another very important indicator of evolving gender roles. Boserup (1970) noted that the role of women in economic development depends on the extent to which economic transformation modifies access to production means and occupations. In Arab countries, female employment is determined by human capital, institutions, gender-related norms, and labor market structure (Fakih & Ghazalian, 2013). In the UAE, state-sponsored development provided many opportunities for women's employment in education, health care, public administration, finance, technologies, businesses and many other spheres. Still, the connection between employment and empowerment goes beyond the process of entering the labor market.

Participation of women in employment can be helpful in achieving economic, professional, social, and psychological benefits. Employment provides women with financial independence and ability to earn income independently. Such process promotes building of professional identity by helping women build their career, gain special knowledge and professional success. Through involvement in professional institutions, women can develop their decision making skills, both in professional organizations and sometimes at home and at family level as well. Employment provides increased opportunities to expand social and professional networks by meeting colleagues, managers and institutional figures that can help further career development. Also, increasing presence of women in organizations provides them with organizational power, especially in the case when women occupy leadership positions. Overall, such factors can increase women's self-confidence and self-efficacy and help them realize their economic and social viability. In this sense, women's employment is not only an outcome of modernization but also its mechanism. On top of it, women can retain family obligations. More generally, according to Esping-Andersen (2009), it is the fact that the changed nature of women's employment is associated with incomplete social revolution as long as institutional arrangements do not accommodate changes in the role of women. This issue also applies to Emirati

women as there could be the situation where professional activity coincides with the expectation of marriage and being a mother.

Therefore: Employment does not equal empowerment

But:

Employment + institutional support + agency + equitable organizational structures → greater substantive empowerment

5.4 Entrepreneurship and Collective Empowerment

Entrepreneurship offers a particularly relevant illustration of how modernization and culture preservation may complement each other. In this regard, Thompson-Whiteside et al. (2021) show that Emirati women entrepreneurs create entrepreneurial identity and adopt certain strategies of legitimizing their entrepreneurial activities in their social and institutional settings. This finding contradicts the notion that entrepreneurship implies individual isolation from tradition-based social ties. Contextualized entrepreneurship has been stressed by Welter (2011, 2020). For Emirati women, family ties might be considered crucial sources of social, economic, and professional help in relation to entrepreneurship and career-building. These ties might bring women financial support, such as investment or assistance in the process of setting up a business. Another kind of help provided by family ties can be social legitimization when family support helps the woman become more accepted within her community and professional environment. Besides, family ties can help get access to information, experience, and contacts, thus making it easier for women entrepreneurs to find business opportunities and partnerships. Practical assistance can also be provided by family ties; for example, through childcare help. The importance of emotional support should not be underestimated as well it helps women to increase their confidence and resilience to cope with the problems of professional activity and entrepreneurship. All the forms of support mentioned above show that family ties are not necessarily restricting factors for women's autonomy. Rather, family ties are social resources for Emirati women to become economically active and participate in

economic processes without losing ties with their families and communities. Consequently, modernization can operate through collectivist structures rather than simply replacing them.

This is theoretically significant.

Classical modernization might predict:

Modernization → Individualization → Weakening of traditional networks

The Emirati evidence suggests instead:

Modernization → New economic opportunities → Reconfiguration of family networks → Expanded women's agency

This represents an important modification of conventional modernization theory.

5.5 Political and Institutional Participation

Another critical change is women's involvement in political and institutional affairs.

According to modernization theory, socio-economic development and differentiation are associated with participation in decision-making (Inglehart & Norris, 2003; Neundorf & Shorrocks, 2022). In the United Arab Emirates, women's participation in political and institutional affairs was encouraged through government policy. The National Policy for the Empowerment of Emirati Women 2023-2031 highlights women's participation in the labor market, future sectors, leadership roles, and skills enhancement while taking into consideration the significance of a supportive family environment (United Arab Emirates Government, 2023). The institutionalization of gender balance indicates the fact that the state became the active producer of social changes. It means that the following process takes place:

State policy → Institutional opportunity → Women's participation → Social normalization → Changing gender expectations

The UAE therefore represents a form of modernization in which state institutions accelerate social transformation.

5.6 Family Roles and Intergenerational Change

Family ties are probably the most theoretically challenging element of Emirati gender transformation. Modernization theory postulates that the process of modernization is accompanied by a weakening of the significance of traditional institutions and individualization. However, it should be noted that the Emirati experience shows both continuity and changes. Alteneiji (2023) proved the presence of considerable intergenerational changes in gender-role values along with persisting family ties. It means that a change in attitudes towards women's education and autonomy does not always mean that there is no place left for family ties. In this case, the idea of bargaining with patriarchy by Kandiyoti (1988) becomes quite illustrative. In addition, the idea of family systems and gender regimes presented by Moghadam (2003) can also be considered. The contemporary Emirati woman can play several roles at once:

daughter + wife + mother + professional + entrepreneur + citizen + community participant

This multiplicity challenges binary distinctions between traditional and modern women

VI. THE ROLE OF GLOBALIZATION

Globalization has accelerated social change in the UAE by connecting Emirati society to international flows of information, capital, education, technology, and cultural practices. Castells (2010) conceptualizes contemporary society as increasingly organized through global networks. The UAE represents an especially intense example of such networked globalization. Globalization has made a great contribution to the changing roles of women due to offering them access to transnational educational, professional, economic and social opportunities. International education enables women to come into contact with different types of educational experiences, diverse knowledge and perceptions about gender, work and social involvement, whereas multinational employment offers chances to get

involved in organizations that operate according to international standards. The spread of digital communication allows women to gain access to information, participate in virtual communities, develop professional identity and deal with different ideas beyond national and cultural boundaries. Global professional networks allow women to interact with mentors, researchers, entrepreneurs, organizations, etc., thus exchanging knowledge and developing professional careers. Globalization has also created opportunities for entrepreneurship based on digital means, international markets and business networking. Being members of international organizations can be another chance for women to make themselves professionally visible and get acquainted with global strategies for development, leadership and gender equality. Meanwhile, exposure to global gender discourses opens up new perceptions about women's rights, leadership, economic involvement, work-life balance, etc. However, for Emirati women these global influences do not lead to the complete substitution of the local culture. On the contrary, globalization and national policy, family structure, culture, etc., are connected in such a way that it leads to an interaction process in which women selectively use global opportunities and ideas in accordance with the specifics of the social and institutional environment of Emirati society. However, globalization does not produce uniform cultural outcomes. According to Benería et al., "globalization may generate new economic possibilities while at the same time perpetuating inequalities and transforming gendered labor" (2015). Said (1978) warns from the postcolonial viewpoint that "assumptions of global cultural convergence inevitably lead to Westernization." The process of globalization seems to offer benefits to Emirati women in some selected ways within their own national and cultural contexts.

VII. THE EMERGENCE OF STATE-LED MODERNIZATION

The UAE needs an adaptation to the modernization theory due to the active involvement of the state in social transformation. The National Policy for Empowerment of Emirati Women 2023–2031 is one of the best examples of institutionalized gender

transformation (United Arab Emirates Government, 2023). In this sense, the policy of women's empowerment in the UAE is directly related to the country's overall efforts to promote economic and social development and national development goals. As a result, employment in the labor market is perceived as one of the major mechanisms for boosting the involvement of women in economic activities and increasing their role in the country's economy. Special attention is paid to preparing women to work in the future economic sectors, including high-tech and innovation sectors. Women's leadership and decision-making participation in both public and private organizations as well as skills development are supported as ways to help women to gain the competencies that are necessary in the rapidly changing labor market. Moreover, women's entrepreneurship is seen as a way to boost the economic role of women as entrepreneurs and to increase economic diversification and innovation in the country. Finally, although women's empowerment is not separated from the context of the family, family stability remains an important dimension within the social development agenda of the country. All these aspects are finally tied to national development, which shows how the process of women's empowerment in the UAE is seen as an issue of gender equality as well as national competitiveness and development. This combination is theoretically important because it demonstrates that women's empowerment is not framed as a conflict between modernity and tradition. Instead, empowerment is incorporated into a broader national-development project.

The resulting mechanism can be conceptualized as:

Economic resources + Urbanization + Education +
Globalization + State intervention
↓
Institutional modernization
↓
Women's educational, economic, and political
opportunities
↓
Changing gender roles
↓
Cultural negotiation and family adaptation

This process is best described as:

Culturally Embedded State-Led Modernization

The theory of state-driven and culture-infused modernization addresses the simultaneous existence of two interrelated trends in modern Emirati society: the fast-paced modernization of institutions and opening of opportunities for women, and the persistence of cultural identity and collective social relations based on family solidarity. In particular, on one hand, the economic diversification of the country, urbanization, growth of educational institutions and advancement in technological and other spheres, as well as supportive governmental policies, provide new possibilities for female members of Emirati society to take part in professional activities, business, leadership and decision making at the governmental level. However, it is worth noting that such modernization trends have not led to the loss of traditional cultural values and family-oriented social relations. On the contrary, cultural identity and family solidarity continue influencing women's choice and their understanding of professional and social activity. Therefore, the existence of both trends indicates that the process of modernization in the Emirati society should not be understood as the transition from tradition to Western individualism. It rather presents the process of adaptation and incorporation of new institutional opportunities into the cultural and social environment of women. Hence, the concept of state-led and culture-infused modernization offers a context-sensitive approach to the explanation of social changes by demonstrating that modernization does not necessarily require the abandonment of collectivism and culture.

VIII. DEPENDENCY THEORY AND THE EMIRATI EXPERIENCE

Dependency theory contributes an important critique by directing attention toward the international political economy underlying UAE modernization. Oil wealth has positioned the UAE within global economic networks, while migrant labor has played a major role in constructing the country's infrastructure and service economy. The country's urban development has consequently been deeply connected to global flows of labor, investment,

expertise, and technology (Khalaf, 2006; O'Sullivan, 2008).

From a dependency perspective, this raises questions about whether economic modernization is structurally dependent on global capitalism.

However, dependency theory has limited explanatory power when applied specifically to Emirati women's changing roles. An alternative theoretical framework through which one could analyze external economic influences on the development of Emirati society and women's status is the dependency theory. Dependency theory points out to the effects of global markets, oil dependence, international labor, capital flows, and global economic integration on development trajectories of nations included in the international political economy. According to this framework, the rapid socio-economic changes in the UAE could not be analyzed only as a result of modernization but rather were highly influenced by the integration of the country in global markets and the economic benefits that resulted from the revenues from oil production, international investments, international trade and transnational economic connections. Oil revenues were used to finance infrastructure development, urbanization, education and institutional expansion, and the economic diversification increased connections between the UAE and global industry and knowledge sector. Meanwhile, the high level of international labor in the country played the role in shaping the demographic and socio-economic composition of Emirati society and in the creation of a highly globalized urban area where Emiratis come in contact with a number of different expatriates. Another aspect of the country's global integration was capital flows and foreign investments which made the development possible of economic sectors such as finance, tourism, technology, education, and professional services. This had indirect impact on women's roles in terms of expanding their access to education and employment opportunities and the possibility of engaging in entrepreneurship. Nevertheless, the dependency theory also emphasizes the structural characteristics and inequalities that might result from global integration. In this sense, the experience of the Emirati society shows that the

changing roles of women were formed as a result of the interplay between the process of development within the domestic state context and the global economic context of the country. While useful for understanding the impact of economic factors on the development of the UAE, the dependency theory is limited in terms of its ability to understand some aspects of the transformation of women's roles in the UAE. First of all, the theory cannot help in understanding the state-sponsored empowerment of women, as governmental organizations try to encourage women to become active participants of the social and economic processes of the country, taking part in education, employment, entrepreneurship, leadership, and decision-making. Second, dependency theory cannot provide any explanations about the transformation of women's education, as it does not cover such phenomena as the expansion of opportunities to receive higher education and the appearance of female professionals. Third, the theory does not provide an explanation of the significance of the institutional gender policy that creates necessary instruments to support gender equality and women empowerment. Fourth, it does not explain the transformation of family expectations regarding the role of women and the gradual acceptance of professional and entrepreneurial role by women, as well as expectations related to marriage, motherhood and family. Finally, the theory does not cover the cultural negotiation of professional identity, which means creation of new professional roles by women while preserving cultural values, family ties and responsibilities toward social groups. It means that while helpful for analyzing dependency in the development of the UAE, the dependency theory should be supplemented by other theories like modernization, gender and feminist theories.

Consequently, dependency theory should be viewed as a critical structural complement to modernization theory rather than as a complete alternative explanation.

IX. RETHINKING MODERNIZATION THEORY THROUGH THE EMIRATI CASE

The Emirati experience suggests five major modifications to conventional modernization theory.

9.1 Modernization Is Not Necessarily Linear

Women's roles can change rapidly in some dimensions while changing more slowly in others.

Educational participation and professional employment may transform quickly, while expectations surrounding marriage, motherhood, and family responsibilities remain comparatively resilient (Alteneiji, 2023).

Modernization should therefore be conceptualized as multidimensional and uneven.

9.2 The State Can Accelerate Social Modernization

Classical models of modernization tend to identify economic development, industrialization, urbanization, and increased standard of living as the main factors responsible for social transformation (Lerner, 1958; Rostow, 1960). In this understanding, socioeconomic development is expected to bring about additional changes in other spheres of life through which society would become more differentiated and modernized. The case of the UAE shows that economic development alone cannot be regarded as sufficient explanation of the rate and direction of gender transformation. In the UAE, the role of state institutions in accelerating the process of women's social and economic progress was quite significant. State institutions created certain policies, organizations, educational opportunities and leadership channels which facilitated the process of women's participation in the development of the country. In this context, governmental initiatives related to the development of women's education, their involvement in the labor market, entrepreneurship, political participation and leadership can be regarded as elements of institutionalization of the process of gender transformation within the framework of country's development policy. The UAE case shows that modernization process in the country should be seen as not only the result of economic development but also as an institutionally facilitated process. In this

respect, the state itself acted as one of the main agents of social change and translated the development priorities into the form of policies and mechanisms creating opportunities for women. In other words, the UAE experience allows to show that classical modernization theory can be extended as it reveals the possibility of active political and institutional agency in the relationship between economic and gender transformations. This suggests:

Development → State capacity → Institutional reform → Gender transformation

rather than merely:

Development → Cultural change

9.3 Tradition Can Facilitate Modernization

Social networks do not have to be seen as obstacles for modernization or restricting women's autonomy automatically. In the case of Emirati women, traditional social networks can become useful social, economic, and professional resources that help to participate in business or employment processes. Researching Emirati women entrepreneurs, it is possible to find out that social relationships can give access to many useful things: information, business contacts, money, mentorship, support, and many other resources that make women economically active (Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2021). Women can use social ties to gain resources needed to start and develop their business. Thus, instead of forcing women to disconnect from traditional networks and become economically active, entrepreneurial participation can allow women to connect these relations and use them effectively.

This view does not comply with the idea that the process of development is based on transformation from collectivist social ties to individualistic ones. In the case of Emirati women, economic agency can be performed within social ties, not against them. For example, the approval of family members can make the social legitimation easier and help to connect useful networks, while relatives can give necessary childcare that will give an opportunity to perform professionally and entrepreneurially. In such way, social relationships can be both places where women

are expected to fulfill certain roles and sources that give necessary resources for economic agency. Thus, the experience of Emirati women entrepreneurs demonstrates the significance of drawing a distinction between social embeddedness and social constraint. Being embedded in family and community relations does not mean that women lack agency; on the contrary, such a situation could give women an opportunity to use social resources to exercise agency. According to Thompson-Whiteside et al. (2021), it is possible to observe how Emirati women create entrepreneurial identities and negotiate their legitimacy within a social context, in which multiple institutional expectations coexist. Consequently, women do not have to make a choice between traditionalism and modernization. In practice, Emirati women are capable of selectively using traditional relationships while embracing modern business and entrepreneurial activities. This view is also confirmed by research studies, which pay attention to the empowering role of close social ties of women entrepreneurs in collectivist societies. Instead of focusing only on constraints associated with collectivism, such studies stress that interpersonal relationships in a collectivist society give women an opportunity to have access to resources, information, trust, and opportunities (see, e.g., Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2021). Thus, modernization in a collectivist society takes place through adaptation and reconstruction of existing social structures. The changed roles of women in the economy will lead to a reinforcement of family and community cooperation rather than its decline. In accordance with this approach, the current research study will regard Emirati women's social networks as mechanisms of negotiated modernization. On the one hand, traditional relations imply certain expectations regarding the fulfillment of responsibilities towards family and community, but on the other hand, such relations could be a source of resources that women need to receive education, work, and start a business. In this way, the dual nature of social networks confirms the cultural embeddedness of Emirati modernization since the progress of women takes place through the continuous negotiation of institutional and social opportunities.

Family connectedness + Modern institutions →
Hybrid forms of empowerment

9.4 Cultural Selectivity of Modernization Process

The UAE's example also shows that the modernization process does not need to involve full assimilation and homogenization into a single culture or the destruction of traditional institutions. On the contrary, a country may choose to incorporate selected aspects of modernity and at the same time preserve its unique cultural values, family structures, and forms of social organization. In the United Arab Emirates, a combination of the factors like economic growth, urbanization, technological progress, educational achievements, and institutional reforms has made the participation in professional activities possible for women who do not stop seeing their families, culture, and communities as essential. In other words, the Emirati women may study, work, start businesses, become leaders, and deal with their family-related duties at the same time. Thus, the process of modernization should be seen not as a process of homogenization, but rather as one of selective adaptation, when societies decide what new institutions, values, and practices to adopt and what not to. Moreover, such a perspective is more adequate than the classical linear model of modernization in which modernity was seen as a universal path of development towards Western individualism and secularization (Lerner, 1958; Rostow, 1960).

In this respect, Samier (2015) confirms the above idea, showing how globalization, culture, religion, politics, and modernization interact in shaping Emirati women's educational leadership. The author's findings show that women's advancement cannot be reduced merely to their exposure to globalization processes and development of institutions. The author argues that women's educational and professional careers are influenced not only by international trends but also by the interaction of those trends with the local cultural, religious, political, and institutional context. Hence, the above findings suggest the relevance of the concept of selective modernization, according to which countries adopt selected aspects of modernity while preserving culturally important institutions. In the Emirati case, then, women's

advancement should be understood not as an indication of cultural Westernization but as part of the more general process of adoption of new professional identities and leadership positions by women alongside their family and cultural obligations.

9.5 Women's Empowerment Can Be Collective as Well as Individual

However, Western-based approaches to empowerment have tended to consider autonomy, independence and self-determination as key factors in measuring progress of women's emancipation. Although these factors are important, they might offer an incomplete picture of empowerment in societies where family, community and collectivism are still at the core of social existence. Sen's (1999) concept of capability offers a wider framework by considering development through people's substantive freedom and capabilities to have the lives they value. In the framework of capability approach, empowerment cannot be assessed only in terms of how much women become independent from their established social ties, but in terms of whether or not they gain real possibilities to choose, develop their capabilities, get resources and take decisions that would influence their lives. Education, occupation, entrepreneurship, leadership, and political participation could be seen as capabilities which open new possibilities for women, while the social and institutional environment in which women exercise their capabilities is no less important than capabilities themselves. Thus, this conceptual framework becomes especially pertinent in regard to the Emirati context, because here the empowerment of women takes place within the society where the family ties, community links, and national institutions are still influential components of the social and professional environment.

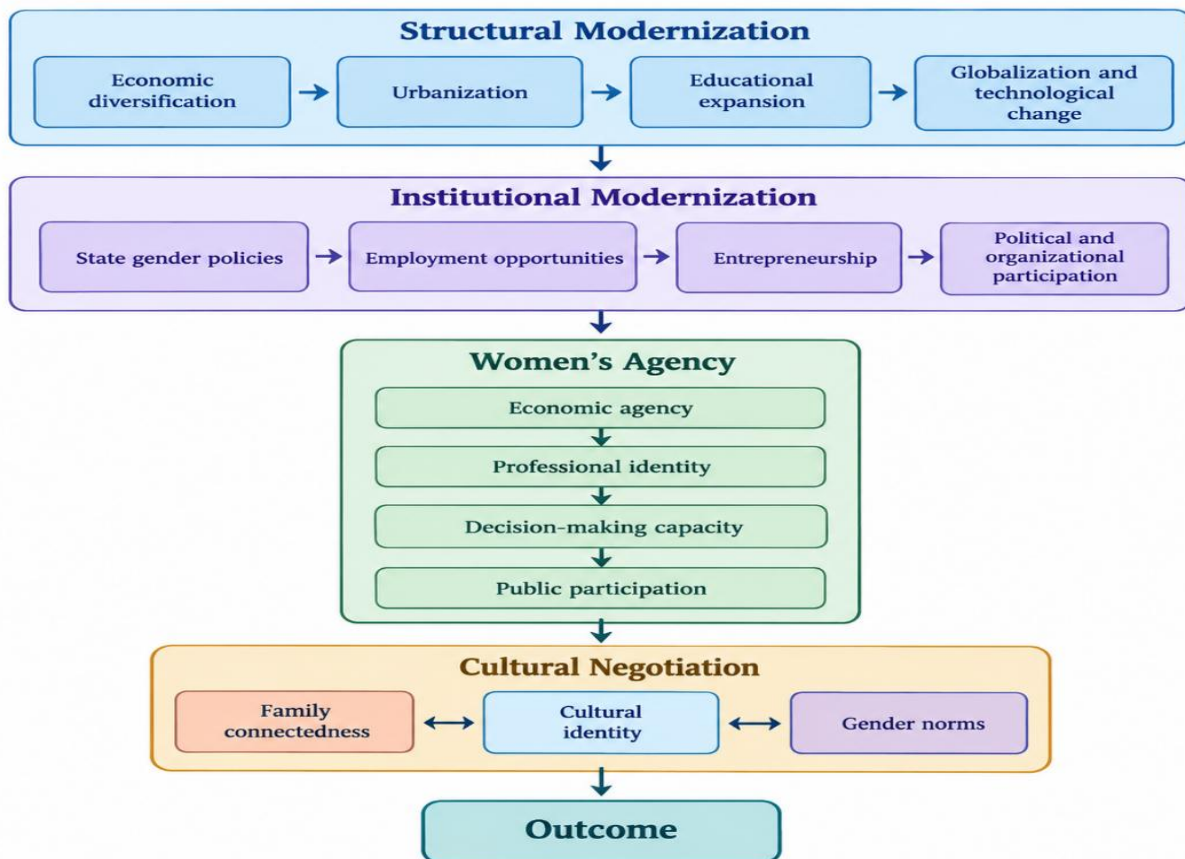
It is thus likely that for the purposes of empowerment of Emirati women, it will have to rely on the networks provided by the family, community, institutions, and even the nation as opposed to individualizing. The networks of the family will provide money, child care, education, social legitimacy, and emotional support, while the networks of the profession and community will help

in accessing information, mentorship, and business. At the institutional level, education institutions, workplaces, professional organizations, and even the government will provide channels to leadership, work, business, and public participation. It is thus possible that collective relationships should not necessarily be viewed as restrictive of women's autonomy, because under particular circumstances, they can operate as resources expanding women's substantive freedoms and capability to act. The empowerment of the Emirati women will henceforth be seen as a relational and collective process that combines individual aspirations with supportive family, social network, institutions, and national developmental policies. In such a way, it becomes

evident that women do not have to move away from collectivist social relations in order to attain empowerment, but they can attain it without necessarily moving away from their cultures and social networks.

X. PROPOSED CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK: CULTURALLY EMBEDDED STATE-LED MODERNIZATION

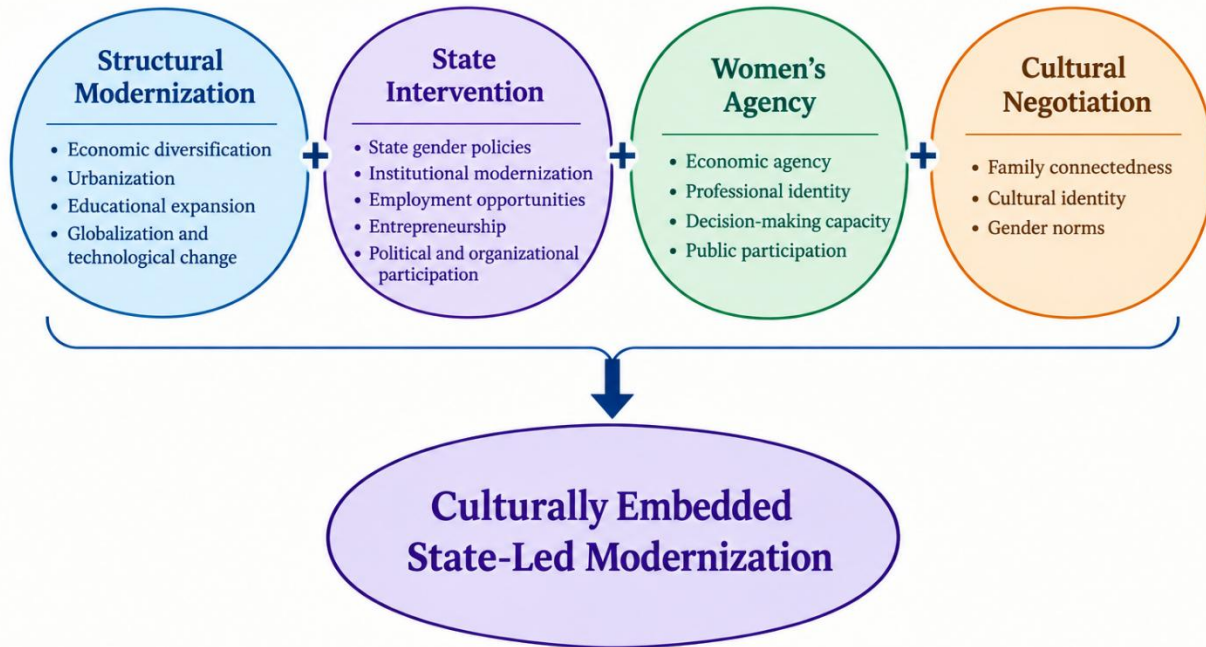
Based on the literature, this paper proposes the following conceptual framework.



10.1 Hybrid Emirati Gender Roles

The model proposes that modernization does not eliminate traditional culture. Instead, structural modernization and institutional intervention interact

with cultural continuity to produce new configurations of gender. The theoretical proposition can therefore be expressed as:



XI. DISCUSSION

In summary, this paper has demonstrated that modernization theory has considerable explanatory power but that it needs contextual adaptation. Firstly, economic development has created the necessary structures to change the role of women. Secondly, urbanization increased women's participation in professional and public institutions. Thirdly, education improved the human capital and aspirations of women. Fourthly, employment has created new opportunities for the economic and social empowerment of women. Fifthly, entrepreneurship has increased the opportunities for economic activity and mobilization of the family and social networks. Sixthly, state policy regarding gender has institutionalized women's participation and hastened developments that would have taken place at a much slower pace. However, at the same time, the Emirati case has demonstrated the limitations of the classical modernization theory. In particular, the most significant lesson learned is that modernization has not required cultural breakdown.

Rather, the women have increasingly negotiated the balance between:

Professional identity and Family identity.

This is in line with Alteneiji's (2023) finding that although the gender role values across generations have changed, the importance of the family connections is still significant. The Emirati experience therefore challenges the binary:

Tradition → Modernity

and replaces it with:

Tradition ↔ Modernity

where the relationship is continuously negotiated.

XII. THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION

The principal theoretical contribution of this paper is the development of the concept of:

Culturally Embedded State-Led Modernization (CESLM)

The concept extends modernization theory by integrating three dimensions.

12.1 Structural Modernization

The concept of structural modernization is defined by various socioeconomic and technological changes that lead to the creation of the necessary environment for the formation of new social roles and institutions. In relation to the Emirati case, the dimension includes the economic diversification, fast pace of urbanization, development of education, technology, globalization and growing occupational specialization. Economic diversification has helped people reduce their dependence on traditional economic activity and develop new branches and careers, whereas urbanization has changed the patterns of living, movement, socializing, and participating in public sphere. Development of education, especially higher education, has provided the Emirati women with additional knowledge and qualification required to engage in various professional and economic activities. Simultaneously, the progress in technologies and globalization processes has provided people with additional sources of information, global connections and means of communications and work. The result of all these changes is the development of various professional identities and careers. All these changes create the necessary socioeconomic background for the diversification of the role of Emirati women.

12.2 Institutional Modernization

Institutional modernization involves the evolution and change of institutional mechanisms which make possible the involvement of women. The following aspects of institutional modernization in the UAE include state gender policies, educational institutions, labor market, business ventures, leadership roles, and institutions for ensuring gender balance. State policies have had a key role in creating institutional arrangements where women can get education, be

employed, become entrepreneurs, take leadership roles and participate in decision-making processes. Educational institutions ensure that women gain qualifications and professional skills. Labor market ensures that women use their abilities and skills for employment and participation in professional fields. Programs and mechanisms for ensuring entrepreneurship help women to start businesses and become more economically empowered. Likewise, programs and mechanisms of providing leadership roles and gender balance ensure higher representation of women in organizational and public decision-making processes. Thus, institutional modernization shows that the empowerment of women is not only an outcome of economic development, but also a product of state intervention and institutional arrangements.

12.3 Cultural Negotiation

Cultural negotiation is seen as the means through which women respond to the new opportunities and shifting roles within the framework of their connection to existing cultural and social structures. In the Emirati setting, these aspects include family values, collectivism, cultural and national identities, gender roles, social networks and other elements of culture. Family continues to serve as an important network of social and emotional support, while collectivist relations offer a possibility for women to access different resources and gain some legitimacy, childcare help, professional networks and entrepreneurship networks. On the other hand, cultural identity and national identity play their role in defining how women view and negotiate their professional and family roles and relations. While changing gender roles offer more opportunities for women in education, employment, leadership and political life, the women still remain responsible for taking care of the family and community. As a result, social networks might be both the space of expectation and empowerment. Therefore, cultural negotiation demonstrates that the process of modernization does not mean abandoning of traditional values and collectivist social relations. The process shows how Emirati women manage to benefit from modernizing opportunities without losing family connectedness, cultural identity and national identity. These dimensions are interrelated rather than

independent. As a result, the proposed model assumes that the change in gender roles takes place through the mediation of modernizing structural factors and culturally-based social negotiations mediated through state institutions. This framework contributes to the field of social change research by transcending the assumption about inevitability of individualization and cultural Westernization in the process of modernization.

XIII. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

13.1 From Participation to Substantive Equality

Women's involvement in education and employment cannot be considered as the ultimate measure of women's empowerment. Even though education and employment opportunities represent an essential basis for enhancing women's potential and economic involvement, the actual empowerment will largely depend on the level of career advancement and influence women can achieve in their professional environments. Consequently, the policies need to consider career advancement by establishing equal access to promotion and professional development, as well as offering opportunities to take leading positions that allow women to exercise decision-making. Occupational segregation needs to be addressed in order to guarantee that women receive access to different occupations and high-value professions, instead of becoming involved in certain occupations only. Moreover, equal pay represents another essential step in empowering women because their economic involvement needs to result in economic benefit. It is necessary to enhance the decision-making authority of women and offer them access to senior organizational positions that imply making strategic decisions and setting priorities within organizations.

13.2 Work-Family Integration

However, the shift in professional roles of women imposes additional expectations upon the families and organizations as well. In particular, the growing number of professional roles implies that more and more women find themselves having to balance between professional activities and their family and caregiving duties. Therefore, according to Esping-Andersen (2009) and the International Labour

Organization (2022), it is necessary to create institutional frameworks that would take into account care responsibilities as one of the key prerequisites for a sustainable presence in the labor market. Consequently, the policies in the UAE could be improved by means of the introduction of flexible working schemes allowing balancing professional and family roles along with the availability of low-cost and accessible childcare services. Moreover, parental leave policies will help distribute care duties in a more balanced manner and will relieve from the excessive pressure faced disproportionately by women. Additionally, family-oriented organizational policies, flexible scheduling, remote or hybrid work when applicable, along with a family-friendly approach to the workplace, will help women build their professional career. It is especially important to make sure that leadership routes allow balancing professional and family roles so that caring does not become an obstacle in climbing up the corporate ladder.

13.3 Women's Participation in Future Sectors

National gender policies in the UAE stress the need for women's involvement in forward-looking economic industries as a crucial step in the country's sustainable development strategy and economic diversification (United Arab Emirates Government, 2023). In line with this policy trend, the future policy initiatives must focus on encouraging the involvement of women in knowledge-based and innovative economic spheres such as artificial intelligence, data science, engineering, cybersecurity, space sciences, renewable energy, entrepreneurship, and advanced research. This will allow increasing the economic opportunities available to women and their involvement in the processes of technological innovation and knowledge generation. Thus, the future policy should facilitate special education and training, scholarships, opportunities for research and mentoring, and career paths in innovative technology industries and leadership positions. At the same time, particular attention needs to be paid to creating a positive institutional environment that would help women make their way from initial involvement up to technical, managerial, and research careers. Through increasing women's presence in strategically significant spheres, the UAE can increase their

economic autonomy while advancing the country's strategic priorities.

13.4 Family Networks as Developmental Resources

Family involvement cannot be regarded as an automatic impediment to women's empowerment. In the case of Emiratis, the relationships of family and community members could be viewed as potential social, emotional, financial, and professional resources. Studies of Emirati women's entrepreneurship demonstrate that social networks could be used as a resource, which enhances the economic empowerment of women through providing them with informational, business, financial, childcare, and social resources (Thompson-Whiteside et al., 2021). Therefore, policy initiatives could be developed in such a way as to capitalize on the networks of families and communities, as well as safeguard the autonomy, rights, and decision-making abilities of women. It is necessary to recognize that women can be empowered through building supportive social relationships instead of detaching women from their families and communities.

13.5 Men's Roles in Gender Transformation

In turn, evolving roles of women affect the roles of men and gender relations in Emirati society. According to Connell (2005), masculinity and femininity have relational nature, thus any changes in education, work, leadership, and economic activity of women may lead to transformation of gender expectations and responsibilities of men as well. It is especially crucial when it comes to the UAE since traditionally, the perception of the Emirati family has been associated with economic provision by men and important roles of women as caretakers and participants in raising children. With growing employment and professional careers, entrepreneurship, and leadership roles of Emirati women and their contribution to the development of the country's economy, these roles and responsibilities become reconsidered. New studies of Emirati masculinity have shown that state support of female employment leads to the transformation of gender expectations and negotiation of gender relations (Clingan, 2025). However, it would be incorrect to regard these transformations as mere shift of traditional roles to others. Changes in Emirati

society might result in more flexible perceptions of masculinity, including economic provision together with care.

In this regard, the proposed transformation is especially relevant for the state-led model of gender equality in the UAE where female empowerment is tightly linked with the development of the country and the creation of a well-developed pool of Emirati professionals. In this case, while government policies increasingly push women to enter future-oriented professions, entrepreneurial activities, as well as decision-making processes, sustainable gender transformation also implies the need of men to adapt to changes in family and workplace dynamics. In particular, men will be required to recognize and accept dual-career families, sharing of family responsibilities, and independent professional identity of their wives while at the same time retaining the value of strong family ties and Emirati culture. In this way, from this perspective, gender transformation should not focus solely on women but include both genders. In this way, gender transformation can be facilitated through policy measures and organizational practices that promote men's involvement in caring work, family-friendly employment arrangements, and corporate cultures where leadership of women and changing family roles of men become an integral part.

XIV. LIMITATIONS

However, there are also some limitations associated with this paper. First of all, the research is based mainly on secondary sources of data and policy papers, not on new empirical findings. Thus, the results of the research represent theoretical synthesis and not the causal relationships. Secondly, the experiences of Emirati women are not homogenous; differences can be observed in relation to age, emirate, level of education, social background, occupation, and marital status. Thirdly, the focus of the research is concentrated mainly on urban society. Experiences of small communities can differ from those of big cities such as Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and others. Fourthly, part of the literature analyzed in this paper represents experiences of the whole Middle East region or the Gulf countries and not the UAE

specifically. Finally, the notion of Culturally Embedded State-Led Modernization needs to be empirically verified.

XV. FUTURE RESEARCH

Future research should empirically test the proposed CESLM framework. A quantitative study could develop and test a structural equation model involving:

Urbanization → Educational Attainment → Employment → Economic Agency → Gender-Role Attitudes → Women's Social Participation

with:

State Gender Policy

as a mediating or moderating institutional variable.

Family connectedness could be incorporated as a moderating variable:

Modernization → Women's Agency

moderated by:

Family Connectedness and Cultural Identity

Future research can use a sequential explanatory mixed method design that can help us explore the extent to which family connectedness and cultural embeddedness shape the process of transforming the role of Emirati women. The research will start by designing and implementing the first quantitative phase through a comprehensive survey involving Emirati women of various age groups, geographical locations, and employment sectors. The survey could be used to measure variables such as family connectedness, cultural identity, gender-role attitudes, perceived institutional support, women's agency, career development, and professional participation. The structural equation modeling (SEM) will be used to analyze the relationships between these variables and see if the role of family connectedness and cultural embeddedness is seen as constraint, resource, or mediator. The second phase of the research will include qualitative semi-structured interviews with three generations of Emirati women. The participants for the interview

part of the research will be selected from the results of the first phase of the research. In order to create contrasts in terms of experiences and opinions, different age groups and various employment sectors should be included in the sample of interviewees. The topics that need to be covered by the interviews are negotiation of family expectations, marriage, motherhood, career aspirations, leadership, cultural identity, and new gender norms. In addition, the experiences related to Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, and Al Ain can be compared, as well as public and private employment sectors.

Lastly, the quantitative and qualitative data would be combined at the interpretation stage. The results from the SEM analysis would reveal the statistical associations between modernization, cultural embeddedness, family ties, and women's agency, while the interviews would reveal how and why the associations work for women on a daily basis. Thus, the research design would go beyond assessing women's involvement in education and labor market activities to look into the process by which Emirati women reconcile modernization without breaking their family and cultural ties. The empirical data generated through the research would serve as a better testing ground for the proposed theoretical construct of culturally embedded state-led modernization in the UAE.

XVI. CONCLUSION

Changes in the role of women in Emirati urban communities serve as one of the most appropriate contexts in which to reflect upon well-known theories of social change and modernization. There is no doubt that the UAE is a unique country where economic changes, urbanization, expansion of education, globalization, development of technology, and institutional reforms take place along with the relevance of family, cultural identity, collectivism, and national loyalty. It is necessary to refer to modernization theory as one of the approaches that explain the processes taking place in the UAE including urbanization, educational expansion, economic diversification, occupational specialization, change of gender norms and roles, and increased involvement of women in professional and public life

(Inglehart & Welzel, 2005; Lerner, 1958). At the same time, the UAE experience shows that modernization does not take place within one homogeneous, universal, and linear framework and can be selectively adopted and culturally negotiated.

Therefore, the transformation in the status of Emirati women cannot be considered as a result of economic development alone. Indeed, the process of changes in their roles and status has taken place due to the interaction of different structural, institutional, social, and cultural aspects. Economic diversification and urbanization created new social and professional environment, while educational expansion provided the increase of professional skills of women. Globalization and technology have broadened the possibilities of getting access to international knowledge and information, expanding professional contacts, and finding new forms of employment and entrepreneurship. Along with all these factors, the crucial role in the process of transformation has been played by the state intervention which has created conditions for women to participate in education, employment, entrepreneurship, decision-making, etc. Thus, state intervention differentiates the Emirati case from classical modernization models where the social and gender transformation occurs due to economic changes indirectly. The evidence also highlights the fact that women's empowerment in the UAE is not necessarily the result of erosion or absence of traditional values. On the contrary, the Emirati women have been able to carve out their own professional, economic, and public roles and yet manage to keep connected to their families, communities, cultural identity, and nationhood. Relationships within the family, which include both obligations and responsibilities on the part of women, may not only help in earning money but also help in giving care, support, legitimacy, and professional networks. In the same way, collectivist relationships do not necessarily negate agency. Under certain conditions, the collectivist relationship itself can act as resource which provides for the exercise of agency. Thus, modernization does not necessarily imply the move away from collectivism towards individualism.

The change in the roles of Emirati women is followed by change in the family relations and gender relations too. Emirati women are increasingly taking up multiple roles as professionals, entrepreneurs, educators, leaders, decision-makers, mothers, and community workers. These multiple roles are not necessarily contradictory to family and cultural identity. On the other hand, it reflects the flexibility of the women, families, organizations, and institutional framework in renegotiating the expectations from women in accordance with the new economic environment. With the change in the roles of women, there will be changes in the roles of men and expectations from them in terms of breadwinning, caregiving, housework, and support for the involvement of women in professional activities. In view of the above findings, this paper introduces the concept of Culturally Embedded State-Led Modernization (CESLM) in order to understand the social and gender transformation occurring in the UAE. The framework of CESLM integrates four inter-related elements: structural modernization, state intervention, women's agency, and cultural negotiation. Structural modernization refers to the economic, technological, and socio-economic conditions under which the modernizing process takes place, involving economic diversification, urbanization, education, globalization, and occupational specialization. State intervention includes state policies, institutions, educational programs, employment opportunities, entrepreneurship programs, and leadership roles that facilitate the participation of women in the process. Women's agency reflects the ability of women to use the opportunities provided to construct professional identities, exercise economic autonomy, engage in decision-making, and become more active in society and institutions. Cultural negotiation refers to the interpretation, adaptation, and incorporation of the transformations into ongoing practices of family relationships, collectivism, cultural identification, gender role expectations, social networking, and national identification.

Thus, the CESLM framework advances classical modernization theory in two important aspects. First, it makes clear that modernization is actively produced and accelerated by state capabilities and

institutionally through policies, instead of being the result of economic development only. Second, it shows that modernization is culturally embedded, but not culturally displacing. The adoption of new institutions, technologies, professional standards, and gender policies does not necessarily imply the loss of family-based values and cultural continuity. On the contrary, the process of modernization can be selectively interpreted and adapted to the existing social circumstances. The UAE is therefore an example of modernization that combines institutional change and cultural continuity. The research has also contributed to the literature on gender and development in terms of providing a broader understanding of empowerment that goes beyond the concept of independence and labor force participation of individuals. While education and job are critical for women empowerment, the phenomenon itself includes career mobility, economic assets, leadership, decision-making ability, professional legitimacy and access to high positions in organizations. What is more, empowerment may take place not only through individualization, but also through relationships and institutions. Such an approach is especially valuable for the Emirati setting, since networks of families, relationships within the community, educational institutions, workplaces and organizations of the state together can empower women in a broader way. In other words, women's agency and their cultural embeddedness should not be considered as mutually exclusive notions; both of them can be employed at the same time as a part of a negotiated modernization.

On the other hand, the case of the UAE cannot be regarded as an example of the situation when modernization eliminates all gender barriers. Participation of women in education, employment, business and leadership can lead to new problems concerning work-family balance, occupational segregation, career mobility, compensation and organizational power, as well as new demands from families. It means that the issue of the quality of women's participation in modern institutions should be taken into consideration, alongside with the mere fact of such participation.

From the case of the Emirati women, it becomes clear that social change should not be considered as a transition from tradition to modernity per se. The question worth exploring theoretically is what forces societies to choose certain modernizing factors and interpret them in their own ways. In the case of the Emirati women, modernization can be seen as a transformative process involving state, relations between people and institutions and cultural adaptation. Economic transformation, urbanization, education, globalization, technology, institutional reform, women's agency and cultural continuity are not independent factors but interact with each other leading to changing of gender roles and social relations. As a result, the CESLM framework offers a new way of looking at the process of modernization in contemporary societies in Gulf States.

Future empirical research will be able to test CESLM framework through the use of mixed methods approach combining large-scale surveys, structural equation models, multigroup analyses comparing generations, and in-depth interviews with Emirati women of various age groups, living in different parts of the country and working in different spheres. The questions which could be studied in the future empirical studies could include whether family connectedness and cultural embeddedness are seen as constraints, resources or negotiated supports by women and how these aspects differ in different cities of Abu Dhabi – Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah and Al Ain, as well as between public and private sector employment. Thus, CESLM could be developed into a more empirically validated framework for studying gender transformation and cultural processes of modernization in the UAE and other rapidly transforming Gulf societies.

In conclusion, the case of transformation of Emirati women's roles shows that modernization is not a universal and linear process and not necessarily involves cultural homogenization. The modernization occurs due to the interaction of structure, state intervention, women's agency and cultural processes. Thus, the case of the Emirati women opens an interesting theoretical opportunity to reconsider the relation between modernization, gender, development and culture.

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