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**The Attitudes and Perceptions of Emirati Employers Towards Domestic  
Workers as Deserving Rights Holders**

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*To the women who cross borders, who show up no matter what, and make all other work possible...*

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## **Abstract**

Prior to 2017, domestic workers were excluded from national labour legislation in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). In September of 2017, the Emirati government adopted the Domestic Workers Law of 2017. Today, there are approximately 750,000 documented domestic workers employed in the UAE, with an average of three domestic workers employed in each Emirati household. This study examines the socio-cultural and legal factors that influence the attitudes and perceptions of Emirati employers towards domestic workers as deserving rights holders. Specifically, it explores the dependency on domestic workers, the value attributed to their work, the extent to which the Domestic Workers Law of 2017 is being implemented in households, and the efficacy of the translation of the law and ‘rights-based’ language in the Emirati society. Based on interviews with Emirati employers, government officers, and employers at recruiting agencies, this thesis argues that most Emirati employers, do not view domestic workers as rights holders. The key findings reveal that: (1) there is a lack of recognition of domestic work as ‘real work’, (2) there is a lack of awareness of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017, (3) most employers hold their moral convictions at a higher ground than the law, and (4) ‘rights-based’ language is a modern phenomenon that does not yet resonate with Emirati society. Furthermore, this thesis proceeds to suggest both bottom-up and top-down recommendations to improve social awareness of domestic workers’ rights and consequently employers’ translation and implementation of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017 into their households.

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Table 1: Demographic Breakdown of Emirati Employers

## **Acronyms and Abbreviations**

**ILO** – International Labour Organisation

**MoHRE** – Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation

**WPS** – Wage Protection System

**UAE** – United Arab Emirates

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Research Problem & Context

According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), there are at least 67 million domestic workers worldwide, and 80% of all domestic workers are women.<sup>1</sup> In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), there are approximately 750,000 domestic workers which account for roughly 8% of the total population.<sup>2</sup> Despite the great demand and reliance on domestic workers across the globe, most receiving countries do not recognise domestic work as labour; it is not credited with the same value as ‘other work.’<sup>3</sup> In fact, labour legislations in several countries often exclude domestic workers from access to rights and protections that are enjoyed by other categories of workers. They are not granted any rights that ensure their dignity and integrity is preserved, nor are they legally protected from abusive behaviour by employers and recruitment agencies.<sup>4</sup> Rather, because women have traditionally performed domestic work and the skills taught by other women in the home are ‘perceived to be innate’, they are deemed as not meriting of pay or recognised as performing ‘skilled work’.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, female migrant domestic workers are a vulnerable population; the intersection of gender-based discrimination and discrimination based on types of ‘otherness’, such as ethnicity and economic status renders them more susceptible to vulnerability and, exploitation.

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<sup>1</sup>International Labour Organisation, “Who are domestic workers”, *Domestic Workers*, 2019, <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/domestic-workers/who/lang--en/index.html>

<sup>2</sup>Malit, Jr. Froilan, T., Al Awad, Mouawiya, and Alexander, Kristian. “The “Khadama Dependency Syndrome”: Determinants and prospects for the future of domestic work demand in the United Arab Emirates,” *Arabian Humanities* 10, (2018): 3

<sup>3</sup>Debbie Budlener, “Measuring the economic and social value of domestic work: Conceptual and methodological framework,” *ILO Conditions of Work and Employment Series No. 30*, 2011: 3.

<sup>4</sup>Theresa Devasahayam, *Human rights and female migrant labour in Asia in Gender, emotions and labour markets: Asian and Western perspectives*, ed. by Ann Brooks and Theresa Devasahayam (London: Routledge, 2011); Malit Jr. et al., “Asymmetric Information under the Kafala Sponsorship System: Impacts on Foreign Domestic Workers’ Income and Employment Status in the GCC Countries,” *International Migration* 54, no. 5 (2016): 76-90; Romani Halabi “Contract Enslavement of Female Migrant Domestic Workers in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates,” *Human Rights & Human Welfare* (2008): 43-68; Kellynn Wee, Charmain Goh, and Brenda S. A. Yeoh, “Chutes-and- ladders: the migration industry, conditionality, and the production of precarity among migrant domestic workers in Singapore,” *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2019): 2672-268.

<sup>5</sup>Budlener, “Measuring the economic and social value of domestic work: Conceptual and methodological framework,” 3.



There are several reports of human rights and labour rights abuses of female domestic workers by employers in the UAE, these include the confiscation of personal documents, the restriction of a day off, extensive working hours, and exploitative working conditions that hinders their integrity.<sup>6</sup> As a result, the Filipino government imposed a ban on sending female domestic workers to countries in the GCC, including the UAE.<sup>7</sup> However, due to the lack of transparency and inconsistency amongst the reporting on this issue it is unclear whether the ban was imposed in 2011 or 2015, and whether it is still operative despite numerous reports in 2018 indicating that the ban will be lifted.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, from 2013-2018, the Ethiopian government also imposed a ban on sending female domestic workers to the GCC.<sup>9</sup> As previously indicated, the lack of transparency regarding the domestic work industry, and the limited sources make it hard to provide concrete, quantifiable evidence on the scale of human rights abuses faced by female migrant domestic workers in the UAE.

Nonetheless, in 2017, the UAE government adopted the Federal Law no. (10) of 2017 On Domestic Workers.<sup>10</sup> The Domestic Workers Law of 2017 outlines the requirement of the employer's treatment of the worker, the rights workers are entitled to and their obligations, the legal prohibitions such as discrimination and harassment, and the regulation of recruitment

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<sup>6</sup>Several reports published by Human Rights Watch dating back to 2006 include [“I Already Bought You”: Abuse and Exploitation of Female Migrant Domestic Workers in the United Arab Emirates](#)”, and [“Working Like a Robot”: Abuse of Tanzanian Domestic Workers in Oman and the United Arab Emirates](#)”; Meaza Ayalew, Geremew Aklessa, and Nkirote Laiboni, “Women’s Labour Migration On The African-Middle East Corridor: Experiences Of Migrant Domestic Workers From Ethiopia,” *Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women*, 2019: 1-29; Rhacel Salazar Parreñas and Rachel Silvey “Domestic Workers Refusing Neo-Slavery in the UAE,” *American Sociological Association* 15, no. 3 (2016): 36-41.

<sup>7</sup>Ismail Sebugwaawo, “Soon, ban on recruiting these workers in UAE to be lifted,” *Khaleej Times*, September 8, 2018, <https://www.khaleejtimes.com/news/general/soon-ban-on-recruiting-these-workers-in-uae-to-be-lifted-1>; Haneen Dajani, “Ban on Filipino domestic workers looks set to be lifted as new agreement with UAE is signed,” *The National*, September 12, 2017, <https://www.thenational.ae/uae/ban-on-filipino-domestic-workers-looks-set-to-be-lifted-as-new-agreement-with-uae-is-signed-1.627932>; Asia Times, “Ban on hiring Filipino domestic workers in UAE to be lifted,” *Asia Times*, September 10, 2018, <https://www.asiatimes.com/2018/09/article/ban-on-hiring-filipino-domestic-workers-in-uae-to-be-lifted/>

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ayalew, Aklessa, and Laiboni, “Women’s Labour Migration On The African-Middle East Corridor: Experiences Of Migrant Domestic Workers From Ethiopia,” 11; Abdulla Rasheed and Aghaddir Ali, “Ethiopia bans domestic workers from taking up jobs in UAE: Ethiopia, UAE governments working to solve issues and abuse faced by maids,” *Gulf News*, December 18, 2018, <https://gulfnews.com/uae/ethiopia-bans-domestic-workers-from-taking-up-jobs-in-uae-1.60899587>

<sup>10</sup>Also referred to as the Domestic Workers Law of 2017.

agencies.<sup>11</sup> Prior to 2017, domestic workers were excluded from national labour legislation in the UAE, specifically Federal Law No. 8 of 1980 on Labour Law.<sup>12</sup> Although it is essential for domestic workers to be protected through legal policies and regulations, it is equally important that these be translated into the attitudes and practices of the employers.

Therefore, considering the recent adoption of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017, this thesis asks and answers the following question: What are the attitudes and perceptions of Emirati employers towards domestic workers as deserving rights holders? This thesis argues that most employers, who are the duty bearers in this context, do not view domestic workers as rights holders. It is argued this is influenced by numerous factors such as the value and recognition of domestic work as ‘real work’, the discriminatory language used to refer to domestic workers, the lack of awareness of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017, and the contemporary nature of ‘rights-based language’. Although they do not see them as deserving of rights, most employers alluded to their morals and beliefs to justify their attitudes towards domestic workers. Moreover, in order to answer the bigger question, this research also addresses the following sub-questions: To what extent do Emirati employers value the work conducted by domestic workers and how is this influenced by existing gender roles? What are the general attitudes towards migrant workers in the UAE? How has the adoption of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017 been translated and implemented into the household and what does that mean for domestic workers’ ability to exercise and enjoy their rights?

## **1.2 Research Objectives & Significance**

In the UAE, approximately 96% of Emirati families employ domestic workers to care for their homes, children, and the elderly.<sup>13</sup> The Abu Dhabi Statistics Centre and the Dubai

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<sup>11</sup>The Federal Law No. 10 of 2017 on Domestic Workers.

<sup>12</sup>The Federal Law No. 8 of 1980 on Labour Law, Article 3(c).

<sup>13</sup>Migrant Rights, “Domestic Workers in the Gulf”, *Migrant Rights*, 2018, <https://www.migrant-rights.org/statistic/domesticworkers/>

Statistics Centre recorded that in 2016 there was a total of 306,100 domestic workers in Abu Dhabi and Dubai only, of which, 219,000 were female and 87,000 males.<sup>14</sup> Further, in 2017, the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MoHRE) revealed that there are approximately 750,000 foreign domestic workers in the UAE, excluding undocumented domestic workers.<sup>15</sup> Findings from Rima Sabban's study on the transformation of the Emirati family, revealed that of the 209 participating families 93% employed domestic workers, 63% of respondents believed that the Emirati family cannot survive without domestic workers, and there were approximately 3.2 to 3.7 domestic workers employed by each family.<sup>16</sup> These figures reveal the high dependency on domestic workers by Emirati families and thus further points to the need to understand why Emirati families employ domestic workers, the value they attribute to the work performed by them, and their perspectives on domestic workers as rights holders.

This research also examines the socio-cultural and legal factors that influence the attitudes and practices of Emiratis concerning domestic workers and their dismissal of domestic workers as rights holders. Specifically, this study explores the dependency on domestic workers, the value attributed to their work, and consequently their lack of recognition as deserving rights holders. Furthermore, it examines the extent to which the Domestic Workers Law of 2017 is being implemented in households and the efficacy of the translation of the law and 'rights-based' language in the Emirati society. Nonetheless, this study reveals that there is a clear disjunction between the employers' employment practices and their views on domestic workers as deserving rights holders which arguably is attributed to their devaluation of domestic labour. Moreover, this study further claims that the lack of awareness of the Domestic

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<sup>14</sup>Marie-José Tayah and Hadi Assaf, "The Future of Domestic Work in the Countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council," *Abu Dhabi Dialogue*, (2018): 17.

<sup>15</sup>Malit, Jr., Al Awad, and Alexander, "The "Khadama Dependency Syndrome": Determinants and prospects for the future of domestic work demand in the United Arab Emirates," 3.

<sup>16</sup>Rima Sabban, "UAE Family Under Global Transformation," *Zayed University Fellowship Programme*, (2014): 3, 44.

Workers Law of 2017, coupled with the modern nature of ‘rights-based’ language in the UAE, prevents domestic workers from exercising their rights.

The existing scholarship in this field is limited because the literature is primarily focused on the violations and abuses faced by domestic workers.<sup>17</sup> While existing literature has explored the coping strategies that domestic workers resort to during their employment in these exploitative situations, there has been minimal research from the perspective of the employers through a human rights lens, and even less so in the context of the UAE.<sup>18</sup> Thus, this research is significant because it presents a new perspective on the employment relationship between Emirati employers and female migrant domestic workers; it relies on semi-structured interviews with the employers themselves and various government officers who are knowledgeable in the domestic work industry and human rights. In addition, this study brings to the forefront the point of view of Emirati employers, a group that has not received a lot of attention in the social sciences, especially in a human rights context.

### 1.3 Roadmap

This thesis is divided into seven chapters. Chapter 2 will provide an overview of the context of the UAE; it will outline the trajectory of the development of the domestic work

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<sup>17</sup>Parreñas and Silvey, “Domestic Workers Refusing Neo-Slavery in the UAE,” 36-41; Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, “DOMESTIC WORK IN THE UAE: THE MORAL DILEMMA OF THE DAY OFF,” *Turkish Policy Quarterly* 18, no. 1 (2019): 117-125; Pardis Mahdavi, “Gender, labour and the law: the nexus of domestic work, human trafficking and the informal economy in the United Arab Emirates,” *Global Networks* 13, no. 4 (2013): 425-440; Virginia Mantouvalou, “Am I Free Now? Overseas Domestic Workers in Slavery,” *Journal of Law and Society* 42, no. 3 (2015): 329-357; Siobhán Mullally and Clíodhna Murphy, “Migrant Domestic Workers in the UK: Enacting Exclusions, Exemptions, and Rights,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (2014): 397-247; Janie A. Chuang, “Achieving Accountability for Migrant Domestic Worker Abuse,” *North Carolina Law Review* 88, no. 5 (2010): 1627-1656.

<sup>18</sup>Sulayman Khalaf and Saad Al Kobaisi, “Migrants' Strategies of Coping and Patterns of Accommodation in the Oil-Rich Gulf Societies: Evidence from the UAE,” *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* 26, no. 2 (1996): 271-298; International Labour Organisation, *Employers' perspectives towards domestic workers in Kuwait: A qualitative study on attitudes, working conditions and the employment relationships*, working paper (2015) Beirut: International Labour Regional Office for Arab States; International Labour Organisation, *Employers' perspectives towards domestic workers in Jordan: A qualitative study on attitudes, working conditions and the employment relationships*, working paper (2015) Beirut: International Labour Regional Office for Arab States.

industry in the UAE. Chapter 3 presents a review of the literature on the commodification of reproductive labour, the status of domestic workers in the Gulf, and the translation of rights-based language. Chapter 4 outlines and describes the methodology used to recruit participants and collect the necessary data for this study. Chapter 5 presents the key findings from the data gathered during the field research in the UAE. Throughout this chapter, the findings will answer the additional research sub-questions; the chapter will address the significance and value of domestic work, the employment practices by employers, law awareness of the domestic workers law of 2017 and implementation, the employers' general attitudes towards migrant workers, and rights language and the role of the government in improving domestic workers' access to their rights. Chapter 6 concludes by highlighting the lessons learned, suggesting further studies, and providing recommendations for policymakers which include recommendations at an international level, top down recommendations at a national level, and bottom up recommendation. Chapter 7 will end with concluding remarks.

## Chapter 2: The United Arab Emirates & the Domestic Work Industry

This research argues that most employers do not see domestic workers as rights holders. In order to examine the socio-cultural and legal factors that influence these attitudes and practices of Emirati employers concerning domestic workers, it is necessary to first understand and contextualise the development of the UAE and the respective domestic work industry. This chapter will briefly trace the development of the domestic work industry in the UAE from the slave trade to migration during the post-oil era, and the legal reforms in 2017.

The UAE is a federation of seven Emirates: Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Sharjah, Ajman, Umm-al-Quwain, Ras al-Khaimah, and Fujairah. It was not until 1971 that the federation was established. Prior to 1971, what is now known as the UAE was then the Trucial States, which existed in special treaty with Great Britain. The discovery of oil in the Arabian Gulf prompted the transformation of sheikdoms into modern states. Over the last 50 years, the UAE has developed tremendously, however, on a socio-economic level it is a “striking picture of contradictions.”<sup>19</sup> The advanced urban development coexists with old systems of interactions, gender roles, modernism and the welfare state, which are all important components of the social, economic, and institutional structures of the UAE.<sup>20</sup>

### 2.1 *Slave Trade*

The practice of employing foreigners to perform domestic labour is not a contemporary phenomenon in the Arabian Gulf states. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, slaves coming primarily from East Africa, via the Omani ports of Sur and Muscat, were relocated to the ports of Sharjah, Dubai, or Ras al-Khaimah.<sup>21</sup> During the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there was a great proportion of

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<sup>19</sup>Sabban “United Arab Emirates: Migrant women in the United Arab Emirates the case of female domestic workers,” 1.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid.

<sup>21</sup>Jerry Zdanowski, *Slavery in the Gulf in the First Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: A Study Based on Records from the British Archives* (Warsaw: Wydawnictwo Naukowe ASKON Sp. z o.o., 2008) 19.

female slaves imported to the Gulf.<sup>22</sup> Nonetheless, there was a great reliance on both male and female slave labour. On the one hand, male slave labour was used for various tasks such as farmers, dock workers, and fishermen. On the other hand, female slave labourers worked as domestic servants or concubines.<sup>23</sup> In the Gulf and surrounding countries, there was a social acceptance for domestic slavery; the general opinion then was that domestic slavery practised in the Gulf was ‘comparatively harmless’.<sup>24</sup>

It has been argued that the strong presence of the British in the Gulf influenced the course of slavery in the region. By the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the slave trade from East Africa began to subside due to pressure from the British – they introduced and emphasised manumitting slaves but were not stringent on the outright abolishment of slavery.<sup>25</sup> Slavery ceased to exist after the discovery of oil in the 1960s.

The mid 20<sup>th</sup> century marked the transition from slaves to household workers; paid household workers were becoming more common. Household workers were hired from amongst the freed slaves, however, male workers were commonly hired for full-time, live-in positions, whereas females performed part-time day work.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the practice of having domestic helpers in the UAE is not a new concept; it has existed in various forms for centuries and has become deeply embedded in the Emirati society and its organisation.

## 2.2 Post Oil

Like its fellow neighbouring countries, the development of the oil economy after 1973 was considered a crucial moment in the UAE. The very rapid rise in the country’s economic

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<sup>22</sup>Zdanowski, *Slavery in the Gulf in the First Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: A Study Based on Records from the British Archives*, 20.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid, 20.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid, 39.

<sup>25</sup>Nicole J. Crsip, “Slaves, Sheikhs, and Sovereignty: British Imperial Sovereignty versus a Sheikh’s Local Autonomy in the Trucial States in 193,” *Footnotes: A Journal of History*, no. 3 (2019): 62.

<sup>26</sup>Sharon Nagy, “This Time I Think I’ll Try a Filipina”: Global and Local Influences on Relations Between Foreign Household Workers and Their Employers in Doha, Qatar,” *City & Society*, no. 10, 1 (1998): 88.

growth coupled with a lacking local workforce brought about a strong demand for migrant workers who were employed in construction, health services, and education.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, with the government redistribution of welfare services, Emirati families were able to enjoy their income and access generous social packages, thus increasing their disposable income and enabling them to hire foreign domestic workers. From the 1980s onwards, there was a shift from an initial dependency on Arab migrant workers to Asian workers who appeared to pose less of an ideological threat, tolerated lower wages, were easier to lay off and segregate.<sup>28</sup>

The migration of Asian labour became highly feminized as the demand for domestic workers continued to grow, especially with the increased participation of women in the workforce. In 1999, it was reported that 116,083 visas were granted to domestic workers, this was an average of 300 visas per day.<sup>29</sup> Today, it is estimated that each Emirati household in the UAE employs, on average, three domestic workers.<sup>30</sup> Traditionally, migrant female domestic workers came from South Asian countries, namely India, Sri Lanka, Philippines, and Indonesia being the major sending countries. However, more recently, there has been a development in hiring domestic workers from Ethiopia. Nevertheless, the Philippines and Indonesia remain the major providers of domestic workers in the UAE.<sup>31</sup>

### 2.3 Under the Spotlight

The UAE has been under the spotlight for its treatment of migrant workers, especially domestic workers and construction labourers. Unlike other regions in the world, the

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<sup>27</sup>Rima Sabban, "Migrant Domestic Workers: A New Public Presence in the Middle East?," *Gulf Labour Markets and Migration*, 2009: 177-202.

<sup>28</sup>Andrezj Kapiszewski, "Arab versus Asian Migrant Workers in the GCC Countries", *United Nations Expert Group Meeting On International Migration And Development In The Arab Region: Population Division: Department Of Economic And Social Affairs* (2006): 1-21.

<sup>29</sup>Sabban, "United Arab Emirates: Migrant women in the United Arab Emirates the case of female domestic workers," 9.

<sup>30</sup>International Labour Office, "Domestic workers across the world: Global and regional statistics and the extent of legal protection," *International Labour Organization* (2013): 33.

<sup>31</sup>Sabban, "United Arab Emirates: Migrant women in the United Arab Emirates the case of female domestic workers," 10.



employment of domestic workers in the UAE falls under the umbrella of the *Kafala* system of sponsorship.<sup>32</sup> This sponsorship system has been greatly criticised and often compared to slave-like conditions because it gives employers immense control of the worker; the migrant worker's employment visa is tied to their employer; thus, delegating the authority and responsibility to the employer. Non-governmental organisations such as Human Rights Watch regularly publish reports and news posts concerning the treatment of migrant workers and the *kafala* sponsorship system in the Arab Gulf states, including the UAE.<sup>33</sup> However, due to the lack of transparency from local sources and media outlets, it is difficult to identify or quantify the number of domestic workers whose human rights have been and are violated.

The extent of the complaints and violations of domestic workers' rights resulted in some sending countries issuing a ban against their deployment to Arab states.<sup>34</sup> As previously mentioned, both the Filipino and Ethiopian governments imposed a ban on hiring new domestic workers in the UAE, although there is a lack of transparency from all relevant parties on the extent to which it was implemented.<sup>35</sup> A local news outlet in the UAE reported on the ban imposed by Ethiopia and their sources at the Consulate General of Ethiopia claimed "recently, we have experienced in some cases that our workers faced problems of non-payment of wages and being denied health insurance. The temporary ban on the recruitment of Ethiopian domestic workers is the first step to weeding out unscrupulous agencies and abusive sponsors."<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Omar Hesham AlShehabi, "Policing labour in empire: the modern origins of the Kafala sponsorship system in the Gulf Arab States," *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, (2019): 1; "Kafala is a system of sponsorship unique to the Middle East whereby every migrant is required to have a *kafeel*, a national sponsor who assumes full economic and legal responsibility for the migrant during their stay in the country"; Narsa M. Shah and Phillipe Fargues, "Introduction," *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 20, no. 3-4 (2011): 268.

<sup>33</sup>Several reports published by Human Rights Watch dating back to 2006 include "[Building Towers, Cheating Workers: Exploitation of Migrant Construction Workers in the United Arab Emirates](#)", "[I Already Bought You": Abuse and Exploitation of Female Migrant Domestic Workers in the United Arab Emirates](#)", and "[Working Like a Robot": Abuse of Tanzanian Domestic Workers in Oman and the United Arab Emirates](#)".

<sup>34</sup>Rasheed and Ali, "Ethiopia bans domestic workers from taking up jobs in UAE: Ethiopia, UAE governments working to solve issues and abuse faced by maids."

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

## 2.4 Domestic Workers Law of 2017

Prior to 2017, domestic workers were not protected by any law. In Article 3(c) of the UAE Labour Law, also known as the Federal Law No. 8 of 1980, it clearly states “the provisions of this Law are not applicable to the following categories: domestic servants working in private residences and the like.”<sup>37</sup> In January of 2012, the UAE Cabinet approved the Domestic Workers Bill, however, it was only signed into law in September of 2017. Due to the lack of transparency concerning the domestic work industry in the UAE, is no clear confirmation on whether the adoption of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017 was in response to movements by sending countries banning workers or human reports by NGOs. However, there have been pressures from NGOs and global institutions concerning labour rights in the UAE and according to a government officer who is an expert in this field he claimed that “there are not a lot of great pressures on the UAE since the law has been adopted.”<sup>38</sup>

The UAE Federal Law No. 10 of 2017, also known as the Domestic Workers Law of 2017, “establishes the principle of informed consent, ensuring that workers are aware of the terms of the contract, nature of work, the workplace, the remuneration and the period of daily and weekly rest as set out by the executive regulations and before they cross their national borders. The law prohibits discrimination among helpers on the basis of race, colour, gender, religion and political opinion.”<sup>39</sup> According to the Domestic Workers Law of 2017, domestic work encompasses 19 occupations, including housemaids, nannies, drivers, and cooks.<sup>40</sup>

The recent adoption of this law, which can be argued is long overdue, is an important advancement for the domestic work industry; it allows for more elaborated regulations which

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<sup>37</sup>The Federal Law No. 8 of 1980 on Labour Law.

<sup>38</sup>Author Interview with Government Officer 2, Dubai, 7 August, 2019.

<sup>39</sup>United Arab Emirates Government Portal, “UAE policy on domestic helpers”, *Information and Services*, 2019, <https://government.ae/en/information-and-services/jobs/domestic-workers/uae-policy-on-domestic-helpers>

<sup>40</sup>These occupations are: housemaids, private sailors, watchmen and security guards, household shepherds, family chauffeurs, parking valet workers, household horse groomers, household falcon caretakers and trainers, domestic labourers, housekeepers, private coaches, private teachers, babysitters/nannies, private PRO, household farmers, gardeners, private nurses, private agriculture engineers and cooks.

are set to protect the various stakeholders. To add, recent reforms to the *kafala* sponsorship system allow migrant domestic workers to obtain their work permit through the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization (MoHRE), with the possibility for these workers to terminate their contract unilaterally. In addition, the UAE government established an Undersecretary for Domestic Workers' Affairs at MoHRE which is in charge of overseeing the newly developed Domestic Workers' Affairs department. More importantly, it is the first time domestic workers are protected through legal measures and have rights and are represented through MoHRE.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>41</sup>International Labour Organisation, "The ILO in the United Arab Emirates," *Arab States*, 2019, <https://www.ilo.org/beirut/countries/united-arab-emirates/lang--en/index.htm>

## Chapter 3: Literature Review & Theoretical Framework

As previously mentioned, this thesis poses the question, what are the attitudes and perceptions of Emirati employers towards domestic workers as deserving rights holders? Despite the limited research on the attitudes of Emirati employers towards domestic workers, an understanding of the theoretical framework can be formulated by exploring existing literature. Therefore, this chapter organises the relevant literature into five themes: domestic work as commodified reproductive labour, domestic workers in the Gulf, employers attitudes towards domestic workers, gender relations in the UAE, and rights translation and enforcement. Each of these themes help establish a framework through which this research builds on and accordingly argues that most Emirati employers, who are the duty bearers in this context, do not view domestic workers as rights holders

### 3.1 Domestic Work as Commodified Reproductive Labour

Generally regarded as ‘invisible’, domestic work entered the domain of ‘reproductive labour’ initially introduced in the work of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels and then used by Evelyn Nakano Glenn and Bridget Anderson to reveal how the concept has been gendered and constructed as ‘female’.<sup>42</sup> Anderson highlights that identifying who ‘does’ the reproductive work, where, and when is crucial and that it is an “expression and reproduction of social relations, and in particular relations between genders.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>The concept differentiated between the production of goods in the economy and the production of labour power needed to maintain a productive economy. The production of labour power involves maintain the worker as a worker and developing him into a worker; it aligns with the notion of the ‘production of human beings’, Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Selected Works, vol. 1* (Moscow: Progress, 1969); Evelyn Nakano Glenn, “From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor,” *Signs* 18, no. 1 (Autumn, 1992): 1-43; Bridget Anderson, *Doing the Dirty Work: The Global Politics of Domestic Labour* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2000); Glenn, “From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor,” 6.

<sup>43</sup>Anderson, *Doing the Dirty Work: The Global Politics of Domestic Labour*, 14.

In order to understand Emirati employer's attitudes towards domestic workers there has to be a shift from a universalisation of women's experiences to a more intersectional approach that considers ethnicity, citizenship, and other inequalities. Other scholars focused on unravelling the complex interactions among race, gender, and reproductive labour which is produced by domestic work in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century.<sup>44</sup>

For example, Glenn observed that white middle-class women in the US freed themselves from reproductive labour by 'purchasing' these low-wage services from women of colour which she argues maintains a 'racial division of reproductive labour'.<sup>45</sup> This division is perpetuated by what Phyllis Palmer argued as race and class hierarchies in the division of labour between "clean mistresses" and "dirty servants."<sup>46</sup> Glenn dismantled the notion that "domestic labour is identical for all women and that it therefore can be the basis of a common identity of womanhood" and suggested to understand race and gender in domestic work as "interlocking systems rather than additive systems."<sup>47</sup>

Rhacel Salazar-Parreñas extended Glenn's concept of racial division of reproductive labour from a US-centred perspective to an international understanding.<sup>48</sup> In her work on Filipina female labour diaspora, Parreñas argued that the international racial division of reproductive labour is a reflection of the global hierarchies of womanhood that are built on inequalities based on class, race, gender, and citizenship that are also present with regards to

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<sup>44</sup>Glenn, "From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor," 1-43; Rhacel Salazar-Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2001); Judith Rollins, *Between women: Domesticity and their employers* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1985); Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild, *Global Woman: Global Woman: Nannies, Maids, and Sex Workers in the New Economy* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002).

<sup>45</sup>Glenn, "From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor," 3.

<sup>46</sup>Phyllis Palmer, *Domesticity and Dirt: Housewives and Domestic Servants in the United States, 1920-1945* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989) 11.

<sup>47</sup>Glenn, "From Servitude to Service Work: Historical Continuities in the Racial Division of Paid Reproductive Labor," 3, 31.

<sup>48</sup>Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work*.

the sending and receiving labour countries.<sup>49</sup> However, she argued that the worth of reproductive labour transforms as the care is transferred along this division of labour. In her work on the recreation of ‘motherhood’, Barbara Katz Rothman argued that “when performed by mothers, we call this mothering...when performed by hired hands, we call it unskilled.”<sup>50</sup>

Scholarship dating back to less than twenty years ago expanded on the notion of international division of reproductive labour to an understanding of the commodification of domestic work.<sup>51</sup> Anderson explored the commodification of domestic work by examining the complex relationship between employee and employer and how it is deeply embedded into a status relationship.<sup>52</sup> She identified that these exercises of power can be expressed through acts of maternalism and thus confirm the workers’ childlike inferiority.<sup>53</sup> Although Anderson focused her research on European contexts, the notion of the commodification of domestic work is transferable to the Emirati context. The underlying power relationship between employee and employer is significant to understand how Emirati employers project maternalistic and paternalistic power relations in the household onto domestic workers.

### 3.2 Domestic Workers in the Gulf

It is important to understand the unique experiences of domestic workers in the UAE because of the highly contested sponsorship system, known as *kafala*.<sup>54</sup> The *kafala* system has

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<sup>49</sup>Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Women, Migration, and Domestic Work*.

<sup>50</sup>Barbara Katz Rothman, *Recreating motherhood: Ideology and Technology in a Patriarchal Society* (New York: Norton, 1989).

<sup>51</sup>Bridget Anderson, “A Very Private Business: Exploring the Demand for Migrant Domestic Workers,” *European Journal of Women’s Studies* 14, no. 3 (2007): 247-264; Helma Lutz, “At Your Service Madam! The Globalization of Domestic Service”, *Feminist Review*, no. 70 (2002): 89-104; Helma Lutz, *The new maids: transnational women and the care economy* (London: Zed Books, 2011); Rhacel Salazar-Parreñas, *Servants of Globalization: Migration and Domestic Work*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2015).

<sup>52</sup>Bridget Anderson, “Just another job? The commodification of domestic labour” in *Global Woman*, ed. Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie Russell Hochschild, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002), 104-114.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid.

<sup>54</sup>*Kafala* is a system of sponsorship unique to the Middle East where by every migrant is required to have a *kafeel*, a national sponsor who assumes full economic and legal responsibility for the migrant during their stay in the country; Shah and Fargues, “Introduction,” 268.

been under great scrutiny by international agencies; Human Rights Watch published reports on the exploitations faced by workers because of this system.<sup>55</sup> Sabban described domestic workers as being at “the mercy of their sponsors”; domestic workers have legally been under the responsibility of their employer.<sup>56</sup> They are also generally required to reside within the home of their employer unless they are hired under the ‘part-time’ or ‘needs based’ services provided by TAD-BEER.<sup>57</sup> This aspect makes their situation unique in relation not only to other migrants workers in the UAE but to the larger domestic work experience across the globe.<sup>58</sup> Parreñas and Rachel Silvey conducted 85 in-depth interviews with Filipina and Indonesian migrant domestic workers in the UAE. Their sample included domestic workers who had run-away and as result sought employment elsewhere, and domestic workers who completed their two year contract but did not renew it with the same family. Parreñas and Silvey concluded that “whenever possible, domestics refuse to tolerate the ‘slave-like conditions’ permitted by the regulatory regime.”<sup>59</sup> Parreñas and Silvey claimed that domestic workers, when possible, would “negotiate the conditions of their labour, whether it is by running away and switching employers.”<sup>60</sup> While their work explored the experiences and resistance of domestic workers in the exploitative *kafala* system, it did not acknowledge the attitudes of the employers and their perception of their role and performance in this sponsorship system.

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<sup>55</sup>Human Rights Watch, “I Already Bought You: Abuse and Exploitation of Female Migrant Domestic Workers in the United Arab Emirates,” *Human Rights Watch*, 22 October, 2014, <https://www.hrw.org/report/2014/10/22/i-already-bought-you/abuse-and-exploitation-female-migrant-domestic-workers-united>

<sup>56</sup>Sabban, “United Arab Emirates: Migrant women in the United Arab Emirates the case of female domestic workers,” 54; Mantouvalou, “Am I Free Now? Overseas Domestic Workers in Slavery,” 329-357.

<sup>57</sup>“TAD-BEER”, Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratization, updated February 26, 2019, <https://www.mohre.gov.ae/en/service-centers/tad-beer.aspx>

<sup>58</sup>Sabban, “United Arab Emirates: Migrant women in the United Arab Emirates the case of female domestic workers,” 54.

<sup>59</sup>Parreñas and Silvey, “Domestic Workers Refusing Neo-Slavery in the UAE,” 36-41.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid, 41.

### 3.3 Employers Attitudes Towards Domestic Workers

In 2015, the ILO published working papers on the employers' perspective towards domestic work in Kuwait; although not specific to the UAE, both countries employ the *kafala* system.<sup>61</sup> The study revealed that domestic workers in Kuwait are part of a social system that renders them vulnerable to exploitation “due to the social fabric of Kuwait” and that even if they were protected through legislation there is no guarantee that it would be translated into the practices of employers.<sup>62</sup> Furthermore, domestic workers are not perceived as ‘workers’ by Kuwaiti employers and therefore practices such as providing a day off or allowing communication to the outside world are not common, let alone considered ‘normal.’<sup>63</sup>

Furthermore, in 2010, Kafa (enough) Violence and Exploitation, a Lebanese non-profit, non-political, non-confessional civil society organization also conducted a study on the attitudes of Lebanese employers towards migrant domestic workers.<sup>64</sup> The study revealed that there was a clear disconnect between the discussions amongst the employers concerning their rejection of the blatant violations of the rights of domestic workers and their practices.<sup>65</sup> The ILO working paper and the study by Kafa serve as a foundation to progress in this area which currently is considered to be a gap in the literature.

A study commissioned by the Secretariat of the Abu Dhabi Dialogue among the Asian labour-sending and receiving countries briefly assessed the “current state of affair in labour matching in the sector in the Emirates of Abu Dhabi and Dubai.”<sup>66</sup> The assessment was based on interviews with recruiters, domestic workers, and employers, however, the study did not further address the responses of the employers. The interview questions were limited to the

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<sup>61</sup>ILO, *Employers' perspectives towards domestic workers in Kuwait: A qualitative study on attitudes, working conditions and the employment relationships*.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid.

<sup>64</sup>Sawsan Abdurrahim, “Servant, Daughter, or Employee?: A Pilot Study on the Attitudes of Lebanese Employers towards Migrant Domestic Workers,” *Kafa (enough) Violence and Exploitation*, (2010): 1-40.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid, 9.

<sup>66</sup>Tayah and Assaf, “The Future of Domestic Work in the Countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council,” 47.



recruitment methods and the skills they require in a domestic worker.<sup>67</sup> Thus, this study illustrates that there is progress and a movement towards having constructive dialogue, especially with employers, concerning domestic workers in the UAE. However, it also reveals that there is still a gap in the literature that focuses on specifically the employers' attitudes towards domestic workers and concerning their access and enjoyment of rights.

Elizabeth Frantz analysed the economic and political factors influencing the market for foreign domestic workers in Jordan; she conducted interviews with both employers and domestic workers.<sup>68</sup> Frantz reveals the importance of the *kafala* system in understanding the perceptions towards domestic workers; the legal responsibility tied to the *kafeel* (the employer) is used as a justification for employers not allowing their domestic workers to leave the house.<sup>69</sup> Although her paper is based on the research conducted in Jordan, the framework Frantz uses in her work is important for this research in order to understand the complexity behind employers' attitudes towards domestic workers which stem from the *kafala* system, social anxieties, and their definition of rights vs. privilege.

### **3.4 Rights Translation and Enforcement**

Scholars have argued that the difficulties with providing rights to domestic workers stem from the issue that domestic work is not always recognised as 'real' work'; they have often been neglected from national labour laws.<sup>70</sup> In her work in Singapore, Nicola Piper explored the notion of an emerging transnational and transregional labour solidarity of migrant domestic workers across South East Asia, East Asian regions, and Europe.<sup>71</sup> Piper argued that

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<sup>67</sup>Tayah and Assaf, "The Future of Domestic Work in the Countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council," 48-49.

<sup>68</sup>Elizabeth Frantz, "OF MAIDS AND MADAMS," *Critical Asian Studies* 40, no. 4 (2008): 609-638.

<sup>69</sup>Ibid.

<sup>70</sup>Devasahayam, *Human rights and female migrant labour in Asia in Gender, emotions and labour markets*; Virginia Mantouvalou, "Human Rights for Precarious Workers: The Legislative Precariousness of Domestic Labour," *Comp. Labor Law & Pol'y Journal* 34, no. 133 (2012): 133-166.

<sup>71</sup>Nicola Piper, "Rights of Foreign Domestic Workers - Emergence of Transnational and Transregional Solidarity?" *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal* 14, no. 1-2 (2005): 97-119.

the implementation of a migrants rights agenda that accommodates the specific situation of domestic workers can only be achieved by forces from below.<sup>72</sup> In the context of the UAE, progress has been made with the adoption of Domestic Workers Law of 2017; domestic workers legally have access to the protections and rights outlined in the new legislation. However, there are still restrictions on domestic workers' right to formation of trade unions, labour unions, or any other organization that concentrates on the issue of their rights.

Sally Engle Merry challenged the essentialist interpretations of culture that assume it to be a homogenous entity, intimately bound up with tradition, resistant to change and maintained by local consensus.<sup>73</sup> In the case of applying human rights to local places such as the UAE, Merry outlined a few problems that hinder this process such as universality, language and transferability, implementation, and state sovereignty.<sup>74</sup> In another article, Merry explores the ways in which human rights can be translated into the local context; the forms of vernacularisation she identifies are replication and hybridity.<sup>75</sup> Nonetheless, in their study on domestic workers' right to a day off in Singapore, Chiu Yee Koh et al., observed that by employing a cultural mediation strategy of vernacularisation, it facilitated the translation of rights-based language in a manner that resonated with the institutional logics and cultural repertoire of Singaporean society.<sup>76</sup> There is a gap in the literature on the transferability of rights in the UAE; most research focused on highlighting the human rights abuses instead of how to employ international human rights into the local context.

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<sup>72</sup>Piper, "Rights of Foreign Domestic Workers - Emergence of Transnational and Transregional Solidarity?" 97-119.

<sup>73</sup>Sally Engle Merry, *Human Rights & Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 16-19.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

<sup>75</sup>Sally Engle Merry, "Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle," *American Anthropologist* 108, no. 1 (2006): 38-51.

<sup>76</sup>Koh et al., "Cultural mediation through vernacularization: framing rights claims through the day-off campaign for migrant domestic workers in Singapore," *International Migration* 5, no. 3 (2017): 89-104.

### 3.5 Gender Roles in the UAE

It is important to explore the broader gender relations in the UAE and their reproduction in the home as domestic work takes place within the confines of the home, also referred to as the 'private sphere'. Crabtree argued that "families in the UAE conform to a patriarchal, patrilineal model" and that despite social progress in many areas such as education and employment, "gender normative behaviour continues to conform closely to the prescribed roles for men and women associated with religion and culture."<sup>77</sup> Thus, these prescribed roles that are assigned to women are indirectly associated with female domestic workers.<sup>78</sup> However, this claim needs to be further researched as it is lacking in the greater (broader?) literature of the structure of the Emirati household.

Schvaneveldt et al., explored the shift from traditional to progressive attitudes of mothers and their daughters towards marriage and family life in the UAE.<sup>79</sup> They argued that daughters were more "likely to report a desire for egalitarian roles in childcare than their mothers" and the majority of daughters "reported a desire for a professional career."<sup>80</sup> However, the willingness to support egalitarian roles in the UAE is not shared by everyone; especially men. Madalla Alibeli, Abdallah Elamin, and Kaitlin Omair argued that the attitudes of men towards women can be explained as a result of the combination of the patriarchal family, tribal social structure, conservative culture and socio-cultural barriers like traditional gender roles and gender stereotypes.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup>Sara Ashencaen Crabtree, "Culture, Gender and the Influence of Social Change amongst Emirati Families in the United Arab Emirates," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 38, no. 4 (2007): 578-579.

<sup>78</sup>Sabban, "United Arab Emirates: Migrant women in the United Arab Emirates the case of female domestic workers," 1-54.

<sup>79</sup>Paul L. Schvaneveldt, Jennifer L. Kerpelman and Jay D. Schvaneveldt, "Generational and Cultural Changes in Family Life in the United Arab Emirates: A Comparison of Mothers and Daughters," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 36, no. 1 (2005): 77-91.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid, 88.

<sup>81</sup>Madalla A. Alibeli, "Gender and Attitudes toward Women in the United Arab Emirates," *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology* 14, (2015): 109-215; Abdallah Elamin, and Kaitlin Omair, "Males' Attitudes toward Working Females in Saudi Arabia," *Personnel Review* 39, no. 6 (2010): 746-766.

The differentiated attitudes towards gender roles and the increased decision making power in the private sphere that women have gained as a result to access to greater opportunities are issues that have been neglected in the literature on societal change in the UAE. Nonetheless, this also manifests a gap in the literature on how attitudes of Emirati employers towards domestic workers has evolved alongside these social changes.

### **3.6 Concluding Remarks**

Although there is limited research on the attitudes of Emirati employers towards domestic workers, the existing literature reviewed in this chapter help establish theories that are in line with this study. The research conducted in Kuwait by the ILO and KAFSA in Lebanon helps frame this study's angle on exploring the perceptions of the employers.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, Koh et al.'s, framework on the cultural mediation strategy of vernacularisation of human rights in Singapore will be used to validate some of the findings and recommend how to overcome the lack of rights-based language in the UAE.

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<sup>82</sup>ILO, *Employers' perspectives towards domestic workers in Kuwait: A qualitative study on attitudes, working conditions and the employment relationships.*; Abdrulrahim, "Servant, Daughter, or Employee?: A Pilot Study on the Attitudes of Lebanese Employers towards Migrant Domestic Workers," 1-40.

## Chapter 4: Methodology

### 4.1 Research Approach & Design

This study adopts a qualitative research approach using semi-structured interviews. The use of semi-structured interviews allows the researcher to adapt questions to suit a particular context or respondent.<sup>83</sup> This is essential for this study as there are various groups of participants including employers of domestic workers, the owner of a private agency recruiting domestic workers, TAD-BEER agency employees, and government officers. Moreover, the flexible nature of semi-structured interviews allows for greater room for the interviewee to express their point of view.<sup>84</sup> Thus, the researcher has access to what the interviewee sees as relevant and important, which is essential in this study as it explores the perceptions of a certain group of people.

### 4.2 Research Participants

The research participants consist of Emirati employers, employees at TAD-BEER centres and private recruitment agencies, and government officers. For this research, the term ‘Emirati employers’ refers to families who have employed either live-in or part-time domestic workers; the interviewees in this category consists of a couple – husband/father and wife/mother.<sup>85</sup> Although they are referred to as ‘Emirati employers’, it is important to note that in the context of this research this can mean that either both individuals in the couple are Emiratis or one of the spouses (usually the wife) is not Emirati.<sup>86</sup> The second category of participants is employees at agencies recruiting domestic workers, including one private agency and two TAD-BEER centres. TAD-BEER service centres are licensed by the Ministry

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<sup>83</sup>Kristin Reed and Ausra Padskocimaite, “The Right Toolkit: Applying Research Methods in the Service of Human Rights,” *Human Rights Center at the University of California, Berkeley* (2012): 15.

<sup>84</sup>Allan Bryman, “Interviewing in Qualitative Research,” in, *Social Research Methods*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2004), 470.

<sup>85</sup>In this thesis the term ‘Emirati employer’ and ‘employer’ will be used interchangeably.

<sup>86</sup>This applied to two interviews.

of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MoHRE), and they provide “integrated services to recruit and employ domestic workers.”<sup>87</sup> Although these centres are privately owned, they “operate according to the statutes and regulations set by the government and under direct supervision by MoHRE.”<sup>88</sup> Lastly, the government officers are experts and *connaisseurs* in domestic workers’ rights and more generally labour and human rights in the UAE.<sup>89</sup> This research mainly focuses on the perceptions and attitudes of Emirati employers, however, it also incorporates perspectives of relevant employees at TAD-BEER centres and government officials in order to grasp the multi-dimensional and multi-sectoral nature of this issue.

#### *4.2.1 Background of Research Participants*

This research is based on the responses from fourteen interviews consisting of nine Emirati employers, two TAD-BEER employees (whereby one interview had two different participants due to work obligations that resulted in another employee stepping in to continue the interview), an owner of a privately owned and run recruitment agency, and two government officers.<sup>90</sup> The Emirati employers come from diverse backgrounds, especially with regards to their upbringing, their educational attainment, their employment status, and employment sector (see Appendix 1 for a detailed table on the demographic breakdown of the interviewees).

The participant at one of the TAD-BEER centres was the private owner of the agency and the second interview, which included two participants, was conducted with the manager and financial director of the centre. Moreover, another interview was conducted with the owner of a privately run agency (one which is not under the direct supervision of MoHRE), which for

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<sup>87</sup>Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation, “TAD-BEER.”

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>89</sup>Due to the level of arbitration provided by the interviewees in their consent forms, I cannot identify their specific place of work nor their position.

<sup>90</sup>The initial sample size was supposed to include 12-15 Emirati employers and 3-5 TAD-BEER employers, however, many employers cancelled at the last minute or did not respond when it came to actually setting a time and day for the interviews to take place. Moreover, a few of the TAD-BEER centres either declined to talk or had to review the consent form with their legal team but never followed through.

the purpose of this research will be called “CARE”.<sup>91</sup> The owner of “CARE” is an Emirati man who has been running his agency for over a decade in the city of Abu Dhabi. These participants interact on a daily basis with Emirati families seeking to hire domestic workers; they have direct experiences with the requests and demands from the prospective employers concerning female migrant domestic workers. Their inclusion in the study is essential to examine how the human rights language in the domestic work sector has changed as a result of the enactment of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017, and the changes that they have witnessed in the attitudes of Emirati employers who use their services.

Additionally, the two government officers who are experts in domestic workers rights and more generally labour and human rights in the UAE are both male, Emirati officers. Officer 1 has extensive knowledge on the Domestic Workers Law of 2017 and works closely with the newly developed Domestic Workers’ Affairs at MoHRE. Officer 2 has extensive knowledge of labour and human rights in the UAE and has also been active in the field and worked closely with construction labourers and their access to their rights.

#### *4.2.2 Recruitment of Research Participants*

This study was conducted over the summer of 2019. The recruitment of participants was challenging as many people travel over the summer. Additionally, this year Eid al Adha occurred over the summer, therefore, many Emirati families were away during the holiday. However, this challenge was overcome by identifying and reaching out to potential interviewees before the summer holidays to determine their availability and then resorting to snowball sampling technique for further referrals. The research participants were mainly located in Abu Dhabi, however, two of the interviews took place on the outskirts of Dubai.

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<sup>91</sup>“CARE” is a pseudo name that I ascribed to the private domestic work recruitment agency to ensure its anonymity is retained.

### 4.3 Data Collection Method

The fieldwork was conducted over the summer during the months of June, July, and August in Abu Dhabi and Dubai. The interviews were conducted in both English and Arabic, however, most interviews were in Arabic. Of the 14 interviews, only four were entirely conducted in English; these interviewees included one of the TAD-BEER centres and 3 Emirati employers who fall under the 25-35 age group. Three interviews were conducted in a mix of English and Arabic and the remaining seven were conducted solely in Arabic. The participants decided on the location of the interview; they had complete decision-making power to ensure their comfort was maintained in the process. The locations varied from employers' homes, cafés, hotel lobbies, TAD-BEER centres, and government offices.

There was an attempt to conduct the interviews in a specific order to then be able to adapt my interview questions based on the answers I received. As a result, my questions evolved or lead to new discussion points which I would not have thought of previously.<sup>92</sup> The interview process was ordered as follows: to begin with, I interviewed a few employers, next "CARE" agency, followed by the TAD-BEER centres, then more employers, then government officers, and finally the remaining employers. The interviews ranged from thirty minutes to an hour and a half. The shorter interviews were conducted with Officer 1, "CARE", and one of the TAD-BEER centres.

All of the interviews were semi-structured. The guiding questions were designed to ensure that participants were able to express their point of view and their realities concerning domestic workers' rights in the UAE. For Emirati employers, the interviews allowed them to share their perceptions regarding the value of domestic work and the influence of gender roles, their employment practices concerning the domestic worker(s) and justifications for such, and

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<sup>92</sup>Antoinette Vlieggar, "Research Methods," in *Domestic Workers in Saudi Arabia and the Emirates*, (New Orleans: United States: Quid Pro Books, 2012), 21-29.



also to share their feelings about the influx of migrant workers and evolving labour regulations in the UAE. The interviews with the various employers and owners of domestic work recruitment centres allowed the participants to share their observations on the changes in the domestic work sector since the enactment of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017 and on the attitudes of employers who request their services to hire domestic workers. Alongside this, the interviews with the government officers were designed to understand the human rights rhetoric in the UAE regarding domestic workers and labourers. Moreover, these interviews allowed the government officers to share the role of the government in amplifying human rights in the wider society concerning vulnerable populations such as female migrant domestic workers. As previously mentioned, the use of open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews allows great flexibility for the interviewees to express their point of view.<sup>93</sup> Moreover, conducting the interviews in person, and quite often in the employers' homes was beneficial to this study as it allowed the ability to observe the interviewees' body language and their behaviour in their homes.<sup>94</sup>

#### *4.3.1 Data Analysis*

To begin with, the interviews were transcribed and exported to NVivo where they were then coded thematically. Before formally coding my interviews on NVivo, I wrote notes and summaries about each interview and reflected on them. The formal coding on NVivo allowed various themes and patterns to be connected and “bring into focus a web of meanings” to help draw conclusions.<sup>95</sup> Moreover, desk research was undertaken to complement the findings and analysis of the semi-structured interviews. Grey literature, including documents and reports by various international organisations such as the ILO, and think tanks such as the Geneva Centre

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<sup>93</sup>Bryman, “Interviewing in Qualitative Research,” 470.

<sup>94</sup>Observing the interviewees' behaviour in their homes was only applicable when the interview was conducted there.

<sup>95</sup>Oliver Heath and Sandra Halperin, “Interviewing and Focus Groups” in *Political Research: Methods and Practical Skills* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2012), 281.

for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue and the Gulf Research Centre were used to gain an understanding of the development of workers' rights in the UAE, the reforms taken by the UAE government at a legal and social level to address the issues faced by domestic workers, and more generally on the development of human rights in the UAE.<sup>96</sup>

#### *4.3.2 Challenges & Limitations*

This research has several limitations, primarily the sample size which is not reflective of the whole Emirati society. Given the limited nature of this research which impacted the time period during which the fieldwork was conducted, it was difficult to have a sample size that was more reflective of the perceptions of Emirati employers concerning domestic workers as deserving rights holders. Had this study been conducted during a different period, preferably not during any seasonal or religious holidays, the sample size would have been larger.

A second limitation is that the majority of the interviews were conducted with Emirati employers residing in Abu Dhabi and TAD-BEER offices located in Abu Dhabi. As a result, the participant sample does not represent the views of Emirati employers living in the other six Emirates which have different levels of urbanisation and development thus impacting their perspectives due to their different realities. However, some of the employers had roots in other Emirates such as Dubai and Sharjah; they were born and raised there or their parents and extended families resided there. The limited geographic diversity of the sample is due to the fact that I come from Abu Dhabi and therefore have an established network there, which I referred to in the snowball sampling method.

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<sup>96</sup>Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue, *"Improving access to justice for workers: The case of the UAE"*, Geneva Centre for Human Rights Advancement and Global Dialogue (2019); Philippe Fargues, Nasra M. Shah, and Imco Brouwer, "Working and Living Conditions of Low-Income Migrant Workers in the Hospitality and Construction Sectors in the United Arab Emirates," *Gulf Labour Markets, Migration and Population Programme* (2019): 1-79

Moreover, one of the challenges is the sensitive nature of this research topic, especially since the main research participants are generally the perpetrators of human rights abuses.<sup>97</sup> Furthermore, the social climate in the UAE does not necessarily encourage or advocate for conversations concerning domestic workers; people are less inclined to share their perspectives on this matter and even more so when it involves the highly protected privacy of the Emirati household. However, my position as an Emirati female researcher, who grew up in Abu Dhabi, was a key factor that helped me overcome this challenge. Being an ‘insider’ in the UAE, was advantageous; the interviewees were more at ease with letting ‘one of them’ in their homes and sharing a discussion on a matter that is complex and peculiar to the region and the UAE.

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<sup>97</sup>Vliegar, “Research Methods,” 26.

## **Chapter 5: Findings & Discussions**

This chapter presents the findings of this research which argues that most Emirati employers do not view domestic workers as rights holders. There are numerous factors such as the value and recognition of domestic work as ‘real work’, the discriminatory language used to refer to domestic workers, the lack of awareness of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017, and the contemporary nature of ‘rights-based language’, which all lead to a state in which domestic workers are not perceived as rights-bearing workers by employers. In order to present the research findings logically and effectively, this chapter will be divided into five themes and several subthemes. The five themes are: the value of domestic work, employment practices, law awareness and implementation, the general attitudes towards migrant workers in the UAE, and lastly rights language and the role of the government. The data that will be discussed in the next sections are from the interviews with the Emirati employers, the employees at various recruitment agencies, and the two government officers.

### **5.1 The Significance and Value of Domestic Work**

#### *Reasons for Hiring a Domestic Worker*

The rapid modernisation in the UAE has improved the overall quality of life with respect to women’s participation in the workforce, the living conditions whereby families now live in bigger and more modern homes, and the overall availability and access to material goods. With these changes came an increased demand for domestic workers, including drivers, nannies, cleaners, and cooks. The general response from all the interviewees with regards to their reasons for hiring domestic workers was their need for help around the house. This varied from reasons such as the size of the house, the increasing number of children, and the long working hours. All the employers, except for one couple hired live-in domestic workers and the main difference between them was the size of their homes. D9 and A9 are a young couple

who live in an apartment; they hired a part-time domestic worker who comes in for a few hours a week to provide cleaning services. The main factor that contributed to their decision to hire a part-time domestic worker is that they are both very busy and have long working days that start at 7am and end at 8pm. However, they were the only interviewees whose reason to hire a part-time domestic worker was solely based on their long working hours.

The remaining eight employers hired live-in female domestic workers to assist in taking care of the children, cleaning the house, and for some, to assist with cooking. For couple A2 and U2 the birth of their son was their main reason for hiring a domestic worker, “for the first few months we didn’t have a domestic helper, but within time we thought we need someone to help us, especially it’s our first baby and we need somebody.”<sup>98</sup> Furthermore, the size of their homes was the most reoccurring reason for employers to hire domestic workers. They often referred to having to hire more than one domestic worker because of the workload and demands that come with having a big home. S1 expressed, “like today you have people who need like two or three domestic workers like one isn’t enough for them”, and Mz8 reaffirmed this claim when she stated “sometimes you need to get two or three helpers because our home is too big and sometimes we might have two workers but with different experience, like now I need a nanny for my children and a housemaid to clean the house...so this is the exact need.”<sup>99</sup> One can observe the constant use of the word “need” in the employers statements regarding their reasons for employing domestic workers. In the interview with S1, she was asked “what’s the first thing that comes to mind when you hear the word domestic worker?”, her immediate response was “housemaid, we need them” which was followed by a laugh indicating the extent to which she regards domestic workers as a necessity.<sup>100</sup> In his response, L1 referred to an analogy, “we think of it as a requirement, like it’s part of the...like you need electricity, you

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<sup>98</sup>Author Interview with Employer A2, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019.

<sup>99</sup>Author Interview with Employer Mz8, Abu Dhabi, 29 August, 2019.

<sup>100</sup>Author Interview with Employer S1, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019.

need utility on the house, also you need a housemaid.”<sup>101</sup> This relationship of ‘need’ has been referred to by scholars as the “Khadama dependency syndrome.”<sup>102</sup> Malit Jr., Al Awad, and Alexander argued that the “Khadama dependency syndrome” will continue to grow in the Emirati society as long as Emiratis continue to have growing disposable incomes alongside the generous social packages and subsidised government services.<sup>103</sup>

Although some participants referred to hiring domestic workers as a “need”, others perceived it as a form of luxury and privilege. This was more apparent in the interviews with the couples in the age group 25-35. Sa7 clearly expressed that his reason to continue employing a domestic worker today is a matter of luxury and the dependable nature of people in the UAE. He refers back to his time studying in the U.K. and how he didn’t have any help there and “it was fine.”<sup>104</sup> D9 also referred to it as luxury and privilege and like Sh7, she also alluded back to her time when she was living in the U.S. and didn’t have anyone help her.<sup>105</sup>

#### *“Mutually Beneficial Exchange”*

Many participants deemed it a “need” and “necessity” to employ domestic workers. The overall consensus amongst the employers was that their decision to hire domestic workers “made their lives easier” and has helped reduce the workload, especially for the mothers and wives. Some acknowledged that without the help of domestic workers their lives would be harder, while other employers conveyed the idea that they could manage without the help, yet initially referred to domestic workers as a necessity. Despite these differences, there was a

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<sup>101</sup> Author Interview with Employer L1, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019.

<sup>102</sup> The “Khadama dependency syndrome”: (khadama is an Arabic word meaning maid/servant) it’s the structural dependency on domestic workers and it has been argued by Froilan T. Malit, Mouawiya Al Awad, and Kristian Alexander that this dependency will not only intensify due to complex micro- and macro-level factors, but also transform into a long-term dependency, given the changing demographic and family structures in the context of rapid globalization.

<sup>103</sup> Malit, Jr., Al Awad, and Alexander, “The “Khadama Dependency Syndrome”: Determinants and prospects for the future of domestic work demand in the United Arab Emirates,” 1-19.

<sup>104</sup> Author Interview with Employer Sa7, Abu Dhabi, 29 July, 2019.

<sup>105</sup> Author Interview with Employer D9, Abu Dhabi, 29 August, 2019; Author Interview with Employer Sh7, Abu Dhabi, 29 July, 2019.

common perception that this employment relationship was a “mutually beneficial exchange” or a “complementary relationship” whereby the employers need them [domestic workers] to assist in and provide a service, which creates more job opportunities for domestic workers, who then utilise their income to financially support themselves and mainly their families. They [Emirati employers] often implied that with these job opportunities they are “also helping those poor families to support them to live their lives, to support their families, to give opportunity for their children to have a good life and to get an education.”<sup>106</sup> The “mutually beneficial exchange” with domestic workers that the employers communicated were centred around financial and tangible benefits that were often addressed as helping their families, “they come from Philippines, from Indonesia, so those people you know also you help them, those mothers you help them to support their family, to make good money for themselves.”<sup>107</sup> However, one participant reduced the relationship with their domestic workers as a commodified good, he states, “we are buying effort and time, we pay them for their time and their efforts so we try to benefit, it’s a win-win case between us.”<sup>108</sup> There was minimal to no consideration on the virtual significance and impact the employment relationship has on the self-esteem and dignity of the domestic worker.

*“But is it really work?”*

During the interviews, a few participants mentioned the hardships and difficulties that come with the job performed by migrant domestic workers. They often referred to the distance from their family as the hardest aspect; L1 stated, “mostly to be honest with you they are in difficult situation, they are here to survive for their family and their children and parents and they come to work here just to come and serve us so I believe life is difficult for them it’s not

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<sup>106</sup> Author Interview with Employer Mz8, Abu Dhabi, 29 August, 2019.

<sup>107</sup> Author Interview with Employer L1, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019.

<sup>108</sup> Author Interview with Employer Mh8, Abu Dhabi, 29 August, 2019.

easy.”<sup>109</sup> This notion was reiterated by A2, she claimed, “she left her entire family behind I mean so we feel for her.”<sup>110</sup> A stay at home mother, H4, empathised with the hard labour of domestic work, she acknowledged that her mentality completely changed when she quit her job and stayed home to raise her children. She expressed “they work way more than us, they work so much, like to be honest with you...I do raise my children and teach them and all but their work like cleaning up and everything is very tiring and consuming.”<sup>111</sup> There is a general empathetic sentiment for domestic workers with respect to the difficulties they face by being far away from their families and living in a ‘stranger’s’ home. Nonetheless, there is also an appreciation for the workload they take on, as was expressed by H4, but this is not an attitude that was widely shared amongst the participants.

When employers were asked about the obstacles and hardships of the jobs of domestic workers, H5 answered “sometimes I’m like what do they really do \*laughs\*, they don’t do anything, Wallah” and his wife, UmK5, agreed with him, “like sometimes they make lunch and that’s it.”<sup>112</sup> Another interviewee, Mh8 even admitted that he views domestic workers as “someone we give all the work to that we don’t want to do.”<sup>113</sup> Moreover, from her experience with a recent domestic worker, M6 expressed that she believes that in the past domestic workers “really came to work,” but that today, in her opinion, only about 70% of them come to “actually work”.<sup>114</sup>

Many participants often conveyed that they would be able to manage without a domestic worker and consequently devalued the hard labour that domestic workers perform. They claimed that domestic workers’ jobs are “doable” and that there are no hardships in the act of the work itself, some even suggested that the domestic workers are “spoiled.” In their

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<sup>109</sup> Author Interview with Employer L1, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019

<sup>110</sup> Author Interview with Employer A2, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019.

<sup>111</sup> Author Interview with Employer H4, Abu Dhabi, 2 July 2019

<sup>112</sup> Author Interview with Employer H5 and Umk5, Abu Dhabi, 21 July, 2019

<sup>113</sup> Author Interview with Employer Mh8, Abu Dhabi, 29 August, 2019

<sup>114</sup> Author Interview with Employer M6, Abu Dhabi, 9 July, 2019



response, H5 and UmK5 stated, “like cleaning and changing the bedsheets and stuff we can do it, if we are serious we can do it, but there are no hardships, dala3 dala3 (Arabic for spoiled).”<sup>115</sup> Similarly, Mz8 also reaffirmed that it would be “doable, like it’s not something we cannot do like khalas I would quit my work and stay at home”, but also admitted that it would still be challenging.<sup>116</sup> These findings echo those of the study conducted by the ILO on the perceptions of employers towards domestic workers in Kuwait.<sup>117</sup> Only five of the 31 respondents in the study admitted that they would not be able to cope without a domestic worker, however, the majority of respondents had contradictory perceptions often implying that it is necessary to employ a domestic worker but that they could also manage without one.<sup>118</sup>

It can be argued that there is a tendency to reduce the work produced by domestic workers – there is always a need to criticise or diminish the value of their work even though essentially the employers admitted they need their help and view them as a “necessity”. Nonetheless, it is also ironic given that on average there are approximately 3.2 to 3.7 domestic workers employed by Emirati families.<sup>119</sup> In the interview with S3, he made an important point concerning this issue, he claimed that the Emirati society is still developing and “it still does not appreciate the people who work in the stores and those who do manual work. They still look at them as ‘working in the air’ and so we need to get to that point where we as a society appreciate this manual work and give it the respect it deserves.”<sup>120</sup> One can observe that these are employers who appreciate the value of manual labour and are able to critically evaluate the importance of these jobs. In response to her husband, F3 affirmed the need to respect every

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<sup>115</sup> Author Interview with Employer H5 and Umk5, Abu Dhabi, 21 July, 2019

<sup>116</sup> Author Interview with Employer Mz8, Abu Dhabi, 29 August, 2019.

<sup>117</sup> ILO, *Employers’ perspectives towards domestic workers in Kuwait: A qualitative study on attitudes, working conditions and the employment relationships*.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Sabban, “UAE Family Under Global Transformation,” 3, 44.

<sup>120</sup> Author Interview with Employer S3, Abu Dhabi, 26 June, 2019.

profession and “how we should not reduce the value of any work”, because they are all important and play a significant role in sustaining a “liveable country and home.”<sup>121</sup>

Additionally, it can be argued that the value and significance placed on domestic work can also be attributed to the gendered division of labour in the Emirati society and specifically, the Emirati household. On a more general scale, families in the UAE conform to a patriarchal model. Despite social progress in many areas such as education and employment, “gender normative behaviour continues to conform closely to the prescribed roles for men and women associated with religion and culture.”<sup>122</sup> Many participants affirmed this notion, often referring to religious convictions and socially constructed expectations of the role of women and men. Participant H5 firmly claimed, “God, who created us, he said, the man has to work and the woman she raises the family.”<sup>123</sup> He suggested that there are “issues” with women’s empowerment and gaining financial independence; women have to fulfil their “natural calling or her designated role which is caring for the family.”<sup>124</sup>

With the evolution of educational and employment opportunities and the need for dual-incomes, there has been an arguably progressive shift of mothers working full time and consequently expressing their desire for more equal participation of men in the domestic labour of the household. In the interview with M6, she vocalised the need to “work together” and that today “we need the dual-income so you see a lot more mothers going to work and so with that we also have to expect the husbands to put more work at home and to participate more.”<sup>125</sup>

While most participants did not explicitly refer to housework as ‘women’s work’ their statements implicitly suggest that domestic work is largely conceptualized as a female’s responsibility. Thus, one can infer that the notion of the gendered division of labour remains

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<sup>121</sup> Author Interview with Employer F3, Abu Dhabi, 26 June, 2019.

<sup>122</sup> Crabtree, “Culture, Gender and the Influence of Social Change amongst Emirati Families in the United Arab Emirates,” 578-579.

<sup>123</sup> Author Interview with Employer H5, Abu Dhabi, 21 July, 2019.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid.

<sup>125</sup> Author Interview with Employer M6, Abu Dhabi, 9 July, 2019.

apparent in the Emirati household. However, the value of this reproductive labour is not identical when performed by mothers/wives and domestic workers; there is no common identity of ‘womanhood’ as the expectations and value differ amongst them. It is important to note that for domestic workers it is the intersection of gender-based discrimination and discrimination based on types of ‘otherness’, such as their migration and economic status that also influences the employers’ perception of their labour as ‘work’. Consequently, it can be argued that their [domestic workers] labour is devalued on first, the basis of it not being recognised or identified as ‘real work’ and second because it is performed by a minority population.

*Terminology: ‘khadama’ vs. ‘amala’ vs. ‘musaa’da’*

In the Arabic language, there are various terms used to refer to domestic workers. In the UAE, and more specifically amongst the employers, there were three terms they most commonly used to refer to domestic workers, ‘*khadama*’ (“maid” in Arabic and translatable into “servant”), ‘*amala manzilia*’ (“domestic worker” in Arabic), and ‘*musaa’da*’ (“helper” in Arabic). All the participants acknowledged that they addressed the domestic workers by their name, however, when they mentioned the domestic workers outside the context of the household to others, they used one of the three terms mentioned above.

While most participants referred to domestic workers as ‘*khadamas*’, a few employers firmly rejected that term. In the interview with H4 and J4, H4 interrupted her husband and expressed “I just have one thing, I don’t like the word ‘*khadama*’ [her husband used the term ‘*khadama*’] - I like nanny or helper. When I was growing up we were not allowed to use that word.”<sup>126</sup> J4 claimed that the term ‘*khadama*’, was commonly used in the past, but his wife communicated “look, this is work, they come here to work and so for me calling them that

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<sup>126</sup>Author Interview with Employer, H4, Abu Dhabi, 2 July 2019

[*khadama*] diminishes their work, they help us.”<sup>127</sup> This perspective was also shared with S3 and F3, they said “we don’t like the word *khadama*! We are not allowed to use that word at all. We refer to them as a nanny or a helper...the only thing that differentiated our lives from theirs is that we were lucky to have oil, they came here to work.”<sup>128</sup> Lastly, the third employee to share this outlook is A2, she respected the fact that in the questions the term ‘*amala manzilia*’ was used, and her reasoning was that “when you use that word for me I feel that they are like any other employee.”<sup>129</sup> Although there was a disparity in the terminology used by employers to describe domestic workers, the employers at the recruitment agencies all referred to the term ‘*amala manzilia*’. However, one can argue that their use of that term is subject to the fact that they are operating in a formal and professional environment.

It can be observed that there is a correlation between the employers’ attitudes towards domestic workers as rights holders and the terms they used to refer to them [domestic workers]. For example, S3 and F3 were firm in their condemnation of the word ‘*khadama*’, they used the word ‘*amala manzilia*’ instead. Accordingly, were very transparent on their employment practices and their view of domestic workers as rights-bearing workers.<sup>130</sup> They constantly referred to domestic workers as autonomous individuals with rights like any other worker or person.<sup>131</sup> Conversely, employers such as S1 and M6 used the term ‘*khadama*’ to refer to domestic workers and correspondingly their attitudes were indicative of them not viewing domestic workers as rights-bearing workers; they often used moral convictions to justify their attitudes.<sup>132</sup> For example, S1 claimed “if I bring somebody they are a human being, I don’t care about what the law says, it is my values on how to deal with people”, likewise M6 expressed

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<sup>127</sup> Author Interview with Employer, H4, Abu Dhabi, 2 July 2019.

<sup>128</sup> Author Interview with Employer F3 and S3, Abu Dhabi, 26 June, 2019.

<sup>129</sup> Author Interview with Employer A2, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019.

<sup>130</sup> Author Interview with Employer F3 and S3, Abu Dhabi, 26 June, 2019.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Author Interview with Employer S1, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019; Author Interview with Employer M6, Abu Dhabi, 9 July, 2019.

“law or not, these are values and practices that religiously, by God we have to apply, they are human beings like any other.”<sup>133</sup>

The findings in a study conducted by the ILO in Jordan on employers’ perspectives towards domestic workers, revealed that the term ‘*khadama*’ continues to be widespread when referring to migrant domestic workers. They argued that although the “term cannot strictly be described as objectification, it is clearly dehumanizing.”<sup>134</sup> Thus, one can infer that this phenomenon is not unique to the UAE, but is apparent in other Arab states. It can be argued that the use of the term ‘*khadama*’, has been socially and culturally normalised; some employers are unaware and indifferent to the connotation of the term. However, the core of term ‘*khadama*’ being ‘servant’ diminishes the professional value of the work; it does not hold the same weight as ‘*amala manzilia*’ and thus influences employers’ perceptions of them as deserving rights holders. This is argued in George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s work, they claim that metaphors structure people’s basic understanding of their experiences and thus shape their perceptions and actions.<sup>135</sup>

## 5.2 Employment Practices

### *Passport Practices*

The withholding of passports has arguably been deemed a very common practice by employers in the Arabian Gulf, including the UAE. In this study, there was an equal distribution among cases where domestic workers were in possession of their passport and cases whereby the employer kept the passport. The employers who allowed the domestic workers to keep their passports such as S3 and F3 affirmed that “of course they keep it! Everyone has their own

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<sup>133</sup>Author Interview with Employer S1, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019; Author Interview with Employer M6, Abu Dhabi, 9 July, 2019.

<sup>134</sup>International Labour Organisation, *Employers’ perspectives towards domestic workers in Jordan: A qualitative study on attitudes, working conditions and the employment relationship*.

<sup>135</sup>George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).

passport.”<sup>136</sup> They further argued that people in society need to change their approach to this, “because these people [domestic workers] are here to provide us with a service, they are not slaves. And even this builds a trust relationship and lets them feel like they are free, and maybe they find a better job and they want to change.”<sup>137</sup> They were very much against the practice of withholding the domestic worker’s passport which was conveyed in their reaction and their tone. Moreover, Mz8 and Mh8 expressed that their domestic worker keeps her passport, she keeps all her personal documents, and they argued that “if you give it to them, if you let them keep it, it’s a way of establishing trust, they will feel more calm and secure and trust you, so we give them everything, it’s their papers.”<sup>138</sup> The majority of the employers who allowed the domestic workers to keep their passport had similar reasons, such as “it’s their papers.” However, one can observe that the language used to describe and justify these practices is not rights-oriented. Although the employers conveyed and implied that it’s their [domestic workers’] personal document and therefore they should be keeping it, they did not explicitly identify it as their right to retain it, but more so that it helped establish a relationship of trust.

The employers expressed various reasons and decisions as to why the domestic workers’ passports were in their possession. These varied from “they don’t need it unless they have to renew paperwork which requires us”, “the passport is safer with us”, and “they gave it to us to keep.”<sup>139</sup> There was a paternalistic tendency from the employers towards the domestic workers; their approach and reasons were conveyed to be in the interest of the domestic workers. UmK5 stated “overall it’s better, because they can use them or give out details for the wrong things”, implying that the domestic workers are incapable of making the ‘right’ decisions and are naïve. In his response, L1 claimed that they keep the passports because it is

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<sup>136</sup> Author Interview with Employer F3 and S3, Abu Dhabi, 26 June, 2019.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Author Interview with Employer Mh8 and Mz, Abu Dhabi, 29 August, 2019

<sup>139</sup> Author Interview with Employer L1 and S1, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019; Author Interview with Employer H4 and J4, Abu Dhabi, 2 July, 2019; Author Interview with M6 and N6, Abu Dhabi, 9 July, 2019; Author Interview with Employer H5 and Umk5, Abu Dhabi, 21 July, 2019.

safer, “just in case for safety...sometimes the room is open, somebody took it, you know for safety we like to keep it, not like as forcing them no not like that.”<sup>140</sup> The employers did not mention or indicate that they saw anything wrong with this practice; they were convinced that they were doing the right thing for the sake of the domestic worker.

Moreover, some employers expressed that they kept their passports in their possession because “it’s safer with them” but when they elaborated on their justification it was clear that they kept it as a “protective” measure. S1 argued, “it is more safe also and it’s the right of the employer they have the passport, like because we pay for the office 15,000AED (4,083USD) so it’s good that at least you have the passport so any problem or anything happen, its protection for you.”<sup>141</sup> From her statement we can observe that first, she is not aware of the provisions in the Domestic Workers Law of 2017, specifically the worker’s right to possess their personal documents, and second, she reduces the value of the domestic worker to a monetary amount that she deems is high and justifiable for her to keep the domestic workers’ passports. Furthermore, employer A2 stated “I...understand the tricks in between like going back to the passport like why they shouldn’t have it, I understand why because...even sometimes the culture they come from, like sometimes they come here and not for the sole reason of working so that’s the tricky part.”<sup>142</sup> She maintains the perception that is common in the UAE that some domestic workers migrate for reasons other than work, that they “deviate” and engage in “promiscuous activities” and are not serious.<sup>143</sup> This is a perspective that has often been attributed to Filipina workers.<sup>144</sup> This attitude reduces the domestic workers and devalues their capabilities; the employers project maternalistic powers that confirm the workers’ childlike

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<sup>140</sup> Author Interview with Employer L1, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019.

<sup>141</sup> The 15,000AED refers to the amount the employer pays to the recruiting agency to hire a domestic worker; Author Interview with Employer S1, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019.

<sup>142</sup> Author Interview with Employer A2, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019.

<sup>143</sup> Sabban, “United Arab Emirates: Migrant women in the United Arab Emirates the case of female domestic workers,” 1-54.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

inferiority. Consequently, the lack of recognition of domestic workers as autonomous individuals determines the employers' disregard of them as rights holders.

### *Day Off*

Another employment practice that had conflicting responses was that of the domestic workers having a day off. According to the Domestic Workers Law of 2017, the domestic worker is entitled to one “rest day” per week and if they work on that day they will be entitled to an alternative rest day or financial compensation equivalent to a day’s wage.<sup>145</sup> There was a general consensus that it was important for domestic workers to have a “rest day” or, also referred to as a “day off”, however, this was not always put into practice by many employers. They offered various reasons why domestic workers did not actually enjoy their right to a rest day, namely that “they [domestic workers] don’t want to take a day off”, or that they had an “alternative agreement” per their contract which essentially did not mention that the domestic workers had a right to a “rest day”.

In the interview with J4 and H4, they claimed that they have a day off but that “we told them they have a day off and that they are entitled to a day off, but none of them has taken it. We told them they can leave the house and go out, but they don’t do it.”<sup>146</sup> Moreover, this sentiment was reiterated by L1, he stated that “I notice from the...what you call it, Filipinos...they need maybe at least twice a month but...Indonesian they don’t ask, but if they ask we give them.”<sup>147</sup> He had a more sympathetic tone, he empathised with the domestic workers and attempted to place himself in their position. The following quote is illustrative of this claim, “yes, I do believe and I recommend also, they will have one day leave, no doubt, I can consider myself for me like what would happen if I stayed here thirty days and I don’t go

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<sup>145</sup>The Federal Law no. (10) of 2017 On Domestic Workers, Article 12.

<sup>146</sup>Author Interview with Employer H4 and J4, Abu Dhabi, 2 July 2019

<sup>147</sup>Author Interview with Employer L1, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019.



outside it's very much not fair."<sup>148</sup> However, his wife had stricter terms, she said, "if they want to go out, we tell them okay you can go, but every week they should go out, no."<sup>149</sup> This reveals how to a certain extent employers have arbitrary authority over domestic workers and their ability to take a day off, even though legally they [domestic workers] are entitled to it. Furthermore, it is important to point to the comparison L1 made with regards to the domestic workers' nationalities and how their demands for a "rest day" differ. His comment helps shed light on the racial and nationality stereotypes that are present in the Emirati society that Sabban discussed in her research.<sup>150</sup> Sabban discussed that Indonesians were perceived to not be as "strong and defensive as Filipinas" and that having a Filipina domestic worker was often considered as a symbol of family status because of their "perceived level of modernity and education."<sup>151</sup>

Moreover, the argument that "they [domestic workers] don't want to take a day off" was reaffirmed by the private recruitment agency, CARE. The owner of CARE clearly stated they tell the domestic worker that they have a day off but he claimed that some of them [domestic workers] said "yes I'll take the day off but where am I going to go?". He continued to argue that employers are okay with the domestic worker staying at home on their "rest day", that "if she doesn't want to work then she stays in her room and no one will bother her, if she goes out that's her right if she stays at home that's her right too."<sup>152</sup> However, this leads one to believe that this behaviour by domestic workers might possibly be due to their feeling of intimidation, resulting in their rights being infringed on by their employers.

Alternative perceptions concerning the right to a day off were that the recruitment agency did not inform the employers that the domestic worker was entitled to a day off. Some

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<sup>148</sup> Author Interview with Employer L1, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019.

<sup>149</sup> Author Interview with Employer S1, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019.

<sup>150</sup> Sabban, "United Arab Emirates: Migrant women in the United Arab Emirates the case of female domestic workers," 1-54.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Author Interview with Private Recruitment Agency CARE, Abu Dhabi, 25 June, 2019.

of even claimed that it was not discussed during the drafting and revision of the contract. When discussing this matter, Mz8 claimed, “the agent told me that he told her that there would be no day off, so I didn’t interfere and say that I will give her a day off”. Her husband, Mh8, interrupted and claim that on the contract he signed it mentioned that she had a right to a day off and that she [the domestic worker] would have had been informed from her training back in the Philippines, but that anyways she [the domestic worker] is “not over demanding, like she never asks for a day off.”<sup>153</sup> Thus one can infer that there is a clear information asymmetry amongst all the parties leading to the infringement on domestic worker’s rights.

Contrary to the attitudes presented above, some employers had very firm views on the domestic workers’ right to a day off. Although the employers did not convey explicitly a ‘rights-based’ discourse and giving the domestic worker a right stipulated in the law or employment contract, they still implemented this practice. Some employers even expanded this discussion to talk about other ‘rights’ domestic workers should be entitled to, S3 and F3 stated “a day off...their clothing choice outside of work is theirs, they are free to decide that, whether they wear a hijab or not they all have their own culture and traditions that we have to respect, I mean that is their life, and everyone has a day off there is not arguing there.”<sup>154</sup> They were very passionate and had a lot to say concerning this issue, they referred to the opposing views that the government and society hold. The following quote is illustrative of this discourse, “like concerning women, it’s still a very patriarchal society, a strict society, but as a country no, the leadership and legislation is fair and accepting of all, so I mean why can’t the people be accepting if the country is? Like you won’t give them a day off? The country built churches for them to go practice their right to their own religion. Like I said it’s double standards, they allow themselves a day off but not others.”<sup>155</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Author Interview with Employer Mz8, Abu Dhabi, 29 August, 2019.

<sup>154</sup> Author Interview with Employer S3 and F3, Abu Dhabi, 26 June, 2019.

<sup>155</sup> Author Interview with Employer S3 and F3, Abu Dhabi, 26 June, 2019.

These findings contribute to the literature that has specifically addressed the question of the day off. However, they differ from the findings in other studies, including Parreñas's study.<sup>156</sup> In her research, Parreñas revealed that employers in the UAE denied domestic worker a day off due to fears of "potential misbehaviour" of domestic workers such as their partaking in illicit sexual activities and the employers' lack of trust in their domestic worker.<sup>157</sup> Nonetheless, this proves that there is no singular narrative concerning employers' practice of the 'day off'.

#### *Accommodation & Foods*

Overall, there was a general consensus amongst all employers that domestic workers should have access to their own room and bathroom. All participants implemented that practice in their homes. The tone used by employers conveyed that this practice was and should be obligatory. They often referred to the importance of domestic workers having their privacy and most importantly for them to feel comfortable. The most common response when the employers were asked if the domestic worker had their own room and bathroom was "of course!". J4 and H4 expressed, "like they need a room and not a small room! One that is decently sized, [and] their own bathroom."<sup>158</sup> Some employers even made adjustments to accommodate the domestic worker's needs to have their own room and bathroom, "she has her own room and bathroom and...so thankfully my father in law helped us out, we basically built her own room and bathroom area."<sup>159</sup> Although there was a general consensus that domestic workers should have access to their own room and bathroom, and that they should feel comfortable, one can question the intention of this, is it because employers genuinely believe that they [domestic workers] have the right to enjoy these basic necessities or is it influenced

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<sup>156</sup>Parreñas, "DOMESTIC WORK IN THE UAE: THE MORAL DILEMMA OF THE DAY OFF," 117-125.

<sup>157</sup>Ibid.

<sup>158</sup>Author Interview with Employer, J4 and H4, Abu Dhabi, 2 July 2019

<sup>159</sup>Author Interview with Employer A2, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019.

by a desire to motivate good work performance by domestic workers? In her response, M6 expressed certain sentiments that can be questionable with regards to the intent behind providing her domestic worker her individual room and bathroom. She claimed “look, you hired someone to come help you and make your life easier at the end of the day, if she’s [the domestic worker] is not well rested then how do you expect her to make your life easier? Right or wrong?”<sup>160</sup>

One of the questions that the employers were asked was “do they eat the same meals as other members of the family? Or do they cook their own food?”. All employers indicated that they eat the same meals as the rest of the household and that sometimes the domestic workers cooked some of their own traditional foods. There was no suggestion that the employers/family had their own food and that the domestic workers were restricted and had to eat different foods. Some employers even claimed that they made sure they accommodated to their ‘special food requests’ and would purchase it for them [domestic workers].<sup>161</sup> Although in their households the employers did not differentiate between the food they ate and the food the domestic workers ate, they did express that they have heard of stories or know of cases where the employers failed to do the same. In his interview, L1 said “some of our neighbours for example the food...they are not sharing with them the food, they might be giving them this much of amount (gestures with his hands – it’s a small amount) and they do what they can, especially if it’s a man like a driver they are giving him maybe some 150AED (40USD) or 200AED (54USD)<sup>162</sup> and they are taking care of their own food.”<sup>163</sup> Moreover, UmK5 also shared a story concerning someone she knows, she stated “she [her friend] counts the food she gives her [domestic

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<sup>160</sup> Author Interview with Employer M6, Abu Dhabi, 9 July, 2019

<sup>161</sup> Author Interview with Employer S3, Abu Dhabi, 26 June, 2019; Author Interview with Employer, J4, Abu Dhabi, 2 July 2019.

<sup>162</sup> Purchasing power in the U.S. vs. UAE – a loaf of fresh white bread (500g) in the UAE costs 4.46AED (\$1.21) and in the U.S. it costs 9.61AED (\$2.62), [https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/compare\\_countries\\_result.jsp?country1=United+Arab+Emirates&country2=United+States](https://www.numbeo.com/cost-of-living/compare_countries_result.jsp?country1=United+Arab+Emirates&country2=United+States)

<sup>163</sup> Author Interview with Employer L1, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019.

worker], the eggs for example...for example they buy frozen chicken for the helpers and they eat fresh chicken”.<sup>164</sup> The participants expressed a unanimous rejection of rationing the food of domestic workers but they did share stories of other employers. It can be argued that there is an element of recognition by the participants that access to food is indisputable.

### **5.3 Law Awareness & Implementation**

#### *General Awareness of the Law by Employers*

The Domestic Workers Law was adopted in 2017. There was a variation among the employers on when they hired the domestic workers with some having hired them over 5 years ago, and some as recently as 6 months ago. However, despite these differences, there was a common factor among all the employers except for one couple, they were not entirely aware of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017. Some employers claimed that they “briefly” heard about it and the one provision most employers referenced they had some knowledge of was that domestic workers were allowed a “rest day”. Moreover, a few employers confused the Domestic Workers Law with the Midday Break Decree of 2004 which bans labourers from working outdoors directly under the sunlight during afternoons in the summer.<sup>165</sup> The Midday Break Decree does not specifically identify labourers as subjects with rights, rather it acts more as a regulatory mechanism for companies to abide by. Nevertheless, the employers awareness of the decree is indicative that they are cognizant of the protections granted to labourers but not that they necessarily understand them to be rights-bearers – this will be further discussed in this chapter.

Sa7 was the only employer that arguably was more knowledgeable and aware of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017. When he was asked what he knew about the law he replied,

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<sup>164</sup> Author Interview with Employer Umk5, Abu Dhabi, 21 July, 2019

<sup>165</sup> United Arab Emirates Cabinet, “Midday Breaks Start From June 15 in UAE”, *United Arab Emirates Cabinet*, 2019, <https://www.uaecabinet.ae/en/details/news/midday-breaks-start-from-june-15-in-uae>

“they have 12 hours a day I think, the official hours it can be straight and can include rest time, there are certain things like 30 days off a year, I think here it’s one day off a week and I think there is certain aspects on what are the general responsibilities, what are their rights.”<sup>166</sup> Of the 18 individual employers that were interviewed, only one had some general understanding and awareness of the law.

The different responses by employers revealed that firstly, as previously mentioned, there was a complete lack of awareness of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017. The following responses are illustrative of this claim, “I don’t know what the law is”, “like what? What does it say?”, and “...I don’t know about the law, I don’t know if it applies to all of the domestic workers, I know in the Philippines they have ... they have their own rules with the embassy.”<sup>167</sup> Secondly, one can infer that there was a lack of awareness of labour laws in general and that domestic workers were not covered or protected by the Labour Law of 1980. In her response, D9 admitted that she was not aware of this but she claimed, “I think it should have been there in the first place, like it’s a bit disappointing to know that it wasn’t there from the beginning.”<sup>168</sup> Thus, one can argue that there is a general disengagement with legal frameworks; the participants conveyed that through their lack of knowledge not only with regards to the Domestic Workers Law of 2017, but also with the Labour Law of 1980 and its neglect of domestic workers. Consequently, this disengagement interferes with their judgement and recognition of domestic workers as rights holders.

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<sup>166</sup>Author Interview with Employer Sa7, Abu Dhabi, 29 July, 2019; The Domestic Workers Law of 2017 stipulates that domestic workers are “subject to a minimum of twelve hours of daily rest”, of which eight must be consecutive” (Article 12b), “entitled to thirty-days paid leave per year” (Article 13a), “entitled to one day of paid rest per week in accordance with the implementing bylaws” (Article 12a), and the law outlines the employer’s and worker’s obligations (Article 15).

<sup>167</sup>Author Interview with Employer L1 and S1, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019; Author Interview with Employer A2 and U2, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019; Author Interview with Employer H4 and J4, Abu Dhabi, 2 July 2019; Author Interview with Employer H5 and UmK5, Abu Dhabi, 21 July, 2019; Author Interview with Employer M6 and N6, Abu Dhabi, 9 July, 2019; Author Interview with Employer Mh8 and Mz, Abu Dhabi, 29 August, 2019; Author Interview with Employer D9, Abu Dhabi, 29 August, 2019.

<sup>168</sup>Author Interview with Employer D9, Abu Dhabi, 29 August, 2019.

It is important to note that there is a clear disjunction between the reality of the extent to which employers are aware of the law and the beliefs held by certain government officers who are *connaisseurs* in domestic workers' rights and recruitment agency employers. The government officer who is an expert in domestic workers rights issues in the UAE claimed that MoHRE has been very "proactive and has not side-lined" increasing awareness of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017. He further stated that "people are aware and we of course do our research and measure that, so you see that people are comfortable with the law, but of course, we have to remember that there if people don't really understand it they will not accept it, but if you sit down with them and review it in detail their point of view changes."<sup>169</sup> However, if one refers to the responses by the participants, strikingly enough, the employers who had recently hired domestic workers, even after 2017, did not know the general provisions of the law.

### *The Response to the Law*

Although most of the respondents were not aware of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017, during the interview they were briefly informed of the general provisions of the law. The employers were asked to express how they felt knowing there was a law specifically for domestic workers, whether they agreed with the provisions, and if they had any insight on how others may or have responded to it.

All the respondents were generally supportive of the idea of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017. They argued that it allowed for greater transparency on the rights and obligations of all parties, especially the agencies. The participants further claimed that with this law the domestic work industry would be more regulated and "it will make all parties more professional and more serious about what they're getting themselves into."<sup>170</sup> Additionally, they argued that

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<sup>169</sup>Author Interview with Government Officer 1, Dubai, 30 July, 2019.

<sup>170</sup>Author Interview with Employer A2, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019.

with the law there would be a mutual understanding between the employer and employee and basic standard of the employment relationship. S1 claimed, “the duty and the rights will be clear, yeah, if we want transparency and...healthy life we need to have a law because not everybody is like they have the same values, the same respect” and this was reaffirmed by H4 when she argued that the law is important because “you still have people who treat them like slaves.”<sup>171</sup> Moreover, F3 expressed that this would reduce the criminalisation of domestic workers, “if she [domestic worker] knew she had places to go to in times of crisis then it would help facilitate things” and Sa7 further argued that having a legal code means that the employers can be prosecuted for their wrongdoings.<sup>172</sup>

The recruitment agencies praised the idea of the new law, especially from an organisational and regulatory perspective. They believed the law helped organise this sector, especially considering the high number of domestic workers in the UAE. Furthermore, they argued that the law helped outline the obligations of the three parties, namely the recruitment agencies, the employers, and the domestic workers.<sup>173</sup> However, they did admit that they have faced some difficulties with customers concerning the new law and its provisions. They often alluded to the cultural differences, “you know the culture here is different from other countries so for them to accept the new law it will require some time” and the idea that this service has been placed within a legal framework and that “as people we are always scared of the law or of things that have a legal concept.”<sup>174</sup> The employers at the TAD-BEER centres even acknowledged that “some employers decide to no longer work with TAD-BEER and go to a private agency so they can have more leniency in the regulations and terms of work.”<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Author Interview with Employer H4, Abu Dhabi, 2 July 2019.

<sup>172</sup> Author Interview with Employer S3, Abu Dhabi, 26 June, 2019; Author Interview with Employer Sa7, Abu Dhabi, 29 July, 2019.

<sup>173</sup> Author Interview with TAD-BEER Agency 1, Abu Dhabi, 26 June, 2019; Author Interview with TAD-BEER Agency 2, Abu Dhabi, 7 July, 2019.

<sup>174</sup> Author Interview with Private Recruitment Agency CARE, Abu Dhabi, 25 June, 2019; Author Interview with Government Officer 1, Dubai, 30 July, 2019.

<sup>175</sup> Author Interview with TAD-BEER Agency 1, Abu Dhabi, 26 June, 2019.



Although the Emirati employers in this study supported the Domestic Workers Law of 2017, they often referred to others, such as their friends and acquaintances, and their rejection of some of the provisions in the law. The most common provision that they referred to as being rejected by others was that of the “rest day.” Many participants claimed that a lot of people don’t approve of the new law specifically because of the weekly rest day, and that those employers often said “how can you give them a day off! And who will work!”<sup>176</sup> Another common provision that others have rejected is domestic workers’ rights to possess their personal documents and objects. This often included the matter of having access to a cell phone. S3 expressed that “there a lot of families who forbid their domestic workers from having a cell phone! And I mean how are they [domestic workers] supposed to communicate with their families? I mean the world has evolved, on the contrary, like let them have a cell phone and just like set restrictions during their working hours, but during her free time you can’t prohibit her...it’s her time.”<sup>177</sup> The participants willingly identified other employers’ rejection of the law, however, they did not seem to notice or address their shortcomings with respect to the Domestic Workers Law of 2017.

### *Implementation of the Law & Accountability*

From the interviews with the various employers in this study, it is clear that there is a lack of awareness of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017. Although there was some mention by the participants that this issue stemmed from the information asymmetry between the recruitment agencies and the employers, the recruitment agencies, specifically one of the TAD-BEER centres, indicated that was the result of a greater problem of accountability and implementation. Under the Domestic Workers Affairs division at MoHRE, there is a specific department that is responsible for the inspection and monitoring of work sites of domestic

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<sup>176</sup> Author Interview with Employer S3, Abu Dhabi, 26 June, 2019; Author Interview with Employer H4, Abu Dhabi, 2 July 2019.

<sup>177</sup> Author Interview with Employer S3, Abu Dhabi, 26 June, 2019.

workers and researching and managing any disputes that may arise.<sup>178</sup> This is also outlined in Article 19 and 20 of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017.<sup>179</sup> However, according to an employer at one of the TAD-BEER centres, this practice is not implemented, and to the best of his knowledge, it has still not been applied in any case.<sup>180</sup>

Another element that affects the efficacy and implementation of the law that the employer at the TAD-BEER centre expressed, is the lack of accountability. He conveyed that there was a lack of accountability from the law enforcing agencies, such as the police, in firstly opening a case and secondly following up with the investigation to then prosecute the culpable. An example he gave was of a domestic worker who was sexually assaulted by her employer.<sup>181</sup> She filed a complaint at the TAD-BEER centre and terminated her contract because she did not want to return to work for that employer.<sup>182</sup> With the TAD-BEER centre, they attempted to file a criminal case against her employer, but the cases did not move forward, instead, the agency had to act as a mediator and due to their legal limitations, they could not hold the employer accountable.<sup>183</sup> Despite the breach of contract by the employer, the centre had to give back to the employer the insurance money because the domestic workers terminated the contract before it's completion date.<sup>184</sup> The employer at the TAD-BEER centre argued that it is because of these inconsistent patterns and lack of accountability that the law fails to be implemented to its fullest. Furthermore, an additional factor that hinders the notion of accountability and law implementation is the 'social image' of female migrant domestic

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<sup>178</sup> Author Interview with Government Officer 1, Dubai, 30 July, 2019.

<sup>179</sup> Federal Law no. (10) of 2017 On Domestic Workers, Article 19 & 20.

<sup>180</sup> Author Interview with TAD-BEER Agency 1, Abu Dhabi, 26 June, 2019.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid

<sup>182</sup> Ibid

<sup>183</sup> Ibid

<sup>184</sup> Ibid

workers in the UAE.<sup>185</sup> These ‘social images’ are often based off of derogatory stereotypes that exist and persists among all different ethnicities and races.<sup>186</sup>

#### **5.4 General Attitudes Towards Migrant Workers**

##### *There is No Alternative*<sup>187</sup>

The UAE hosts the 5th largest migrant populations in the world with migrant workers accounting for almost 90% of the population.<sup>188</sup> In 2017, MoHRE acknowledged the presence of 750,000 foreign domestic workers, excluding undocumented domestic workers.<sup>189</sup> These numbers are empirical evidence on the UAE’s dependency of migrant workers, and this was a perspective that was shared by many participants. Many participants admitted that their help is needed and there is no alternative way with the way the UAE is developed and continues to develop.<sup>190</sup> There is a lack of “human capital” for Emiratis to do the jobs migrant workers are hired to perform.<sup>191</sup> M6 expressed “who else would do these jobs then? Who else would clean the streets? That’s the problem...we need them, and also maybe we can say we have gotten used to them.”<sup>192</sup> However, this necessity is often met with tensions on the high number of migrant workers. On the one hand, some participants shared feelings of “suffocation”, “annoyance” and that it’s “too much”. While on the other hand, some participants empathised with the workers’ situations and presented their perceptions from an economic and opportunity standpoint. They claimed that the high numbers of migrant workers is a good thing because it

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<sup>185</sup>Sabban, “United Arab Emirates: Migrant women in the United Arab Emirates the case of female domestic workers,” 1-54.

<sup>186</sup>Ibid, 1-54; Author Interview with TAD-BEER Agency 1, Abu Dhabi, 26 June, 2019.

<sup>187</sup>The term migrant worker in this subsection refers to those who are participating in manual, ‘low-skilled’ labour.

<sup>188</sup>International Labour Organisation, “Labour Migration”, *Arab States*, 2019, <https://www.ilo.org/beirut/areasofwork/labour-migration/lang--en/index.html>

<sup>189</sup>Malit, Jr., Al Awad, and Alexander, “The “Khadama Dependency Syndrome”: Determinants and prospects for the future of domestic work demand in the United Arab Emirates,” 1-19.

<sup>190</sup>Author Interview with Employer S3, Abu Dhabi, 26 June, 2019; Author Interview with Employer M6, Abu Dhabi, 9 July, 2019.

<sup>191</sup>Author Interview with Employer F3, Abu Dhabi, 26 June, 2019.

<sup>192</sup>Author Interview with Employer M6, Abu Dhabi, 9 July, 2019.

creates opportunities for those who come from countries where they would not be earning enough.<sup>193</sup> However, they also expressed the importance of “placing ourselves in their situations” and making the effort to be conscious of that.<sup>194</sup>

Although it is evident that the high numbers of migrant workers is driven by a need, there is also a stigma placed on those jobs that deems them as ‘unsuitable’ or ‘unfit’ for an Emirati. As M6 stated, “you know in other Arab countries that is the norm, it’s normal, but here...I don’t think people will accept that \*laughs\*, if your children now can’t take out the trash I don’t think they’ll accept that...I’m being honest here, it’s the reality.”<sup>195</sup> This rhetoric was affirmed by D9, she argued that “we can use our own people too with some of the jobs, but people are ashamed to be doing some of the jobs.”<sup>196</sup> D9 recalled an instance where this stigma was apparent, she said “when we came back from the states, my husband ~~he~~ had no job, and he literally went to a movie theatre and was like I’ll sell tickets and when he gave them his resume they’re like no you’re local [Emirati] so what I’m a local who needs a job you know. If you’re saying that I’m a local give me a job then.”<sup>197</sup> The jobs performed by migrant workers are perceived as less worthy; there is a lack of appreciation for manual labour and the values of these jobs are reduced and identified as ‘appropriate’ for people of certain nationalities and ethnicities. Moreover, a comment made by H5 clearly depicted the discourse of ‘superiority’. When asked about whether he thinks migrant workers are treated fairly in comparison to other Emiratis and “expats”<sup>198</sup>, he stated “it depends on the lifestyle, it depends on that, like people

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<sup>193</sup> Author Interview with Employer L1 and S1, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019; Author Interview with Employer A2 and U2, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019; Author Interview with Employer, J4, Abu Dhabi, 2 July 2019.

<sup>194</sup> Author Interview with Employer M6, Abu Dhabi, 9 July, 2019.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

<sup>196</sup> Author Interview with Employer D9, Abu Dhabi, 29 August, 2019.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid.

<sup>198</sup> Important to note the lexicon used to describe foreigners in the UAE -- The two terms, ‘worker’ and ‘expatriate’ refers to two distinctive groups of people. A ‘worker’ refers to individuals who are not from Western countries and who make in the lower range of the salary spectrum; a ‘worker’ immediately denotes a South Asian, Arab, Asian, or African nationality. Conversely, ‘expatriate’ is associated with an individual from a Western country regardless of their salary; Jane Bristol-Rhys, “Socio-Spatial Boundaries in Abu Dhabi,” in *Migrant Labor in the Persian Gulf*, ed. Mehran Kamrava and Zahra Babar (London: C. Hurst & Co., 2012) 59-84.

here, us Khaleejis we have a certain lifestyle that is different.”<sup>199</sup> His comments insinuated there is a certain ‘level’ and ‘lifestyle’ that Khaleejis are expected and entitled to have that ‘others’ do not require.

### *Domestic Workers vs. Labourers*

There is a general consensus among the participants that there is a difference in the treatment of ‘workers’ in comparison to ‘expats’. However, many participants conveyed that they felt that domestic workers “don’t have it as bad” as construction labourers or street sweepers.<sup>200</sup> It is important to note that they were not specifically asked to compare the treatment of domestic workers and labourers but a few participants did so on their own terms. They often alluded to the idea that domestic workers “they’re indoors at home, like they have access to food, they have a bed, shelter, internet all of that.”<sup>201</sup> Additionally, they argued that domestic workers live in better environments, in “family environments” and that labourers live in labour camps and they “lack that emotional attachment or familial feeling.”<sup>202</sup> This perception was also shared by a government officer, he suggested that the working and living conditions of labourers are tougher and that they were faced with more struggles than domestic workers.<sup>203</sup> Moreover, Mz and Mh conveyed that they usually hear others referring to domestic workers as “playing the role of the ‘mesqueen’ or the victim and they like that” and that “the return is not equal, even if you [employer] were very nice and gave them everything but still they’ll tell you to return them to agency or send them home.”<sup>204</sup> However, when describing labourers they reemphasised the “need” for them and that they too are people in need.<sup>205</sup> If the

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<sup>199</sup> Author Interview with Employer H5, Abu Dhabi, 21 July, 2019.

<sup>200</sup> Author Interview with Employer Umk5, Abu Dhabi, 21 July, 2019; Author Interview with Employer, H4, Abu Dhabi, 2 July 2019; Author Interview with Employer M6, Abu Dhabi, 9 July, 2019; Author Interview with Employer Mh8 and Mz8, Abu Dhabi, 29 August, 2019.

<sup>201</sup> Author Interview with Employer H5, Abu Dhabi, 21 July, 2019.

<sup>202</sup> Author Interview with Employer Umk5, Abu Dhabi, 21 July, 2019.

<sup>203</sup> Author Interview with Government Officer 2, Dubai, 7 August, 2019.

<sup>204</sup> Author Interview with Employer Mh8 and Mz8, Abu Dhabi, 29 August, 2019

<sup>205</sup> Author Interview with Employer Mh8 and Mz8, Abu Dhabi, 29 August, 2019.

participants did not explicitly compare their situations, they used more empathetic language and tone to describe the treatment and conditions of labourers than that of domestic workers. When describing their perceptions of labourers employers often said things such as “I really feel bad for them” “haram aleihum”, and “it’s sad.”<sup>206</sup>

These comparisons and differences in the perceptions of both populations depict how the workings conditions of domestic workers are often undermined. There is a tendency for people to fixate on the tangible and material things that migrant workers have access to or can enjoy, rather than understanding and recognising the hard and emotional labour that is required in domestic work. Moreover, the comparative discourse also reinforces the idea that not all jobs are perceived to be equally valuable, and that is reflective on the recognition of the people performing those jobs and their worth.

## **5.5 Rights Language & the Role of the Government**

### *Rights Language*

Throughout the interviews, participants rarely referred to or used ‘rights-based’ language. As a government officer pointed out, “it’s a new concept, it’s not a language that’s common here.”<sup>207</sup> The employers often alluded to personal values or religious beliefs to justify their moral conduct towards domestic workers. Some of the reoccurring beliefs expressed by employers was that “law or not, these are values and practices that religiously, by God we have to apply, they are human beings like any other” and “we don’t go around managing everything and being like look this is the contract you have to do this and that, no like, like our religion and belief is our law.”<sup>208</sup> Religion is a highly valued element in the UAE; it is often identified

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<sup>206</sup> Author Interview with Employer A2, Abu Dhabi, 23 June, 2019; Author Interview with Employer Umk5, Abu Dhabi, 21 July, 2019; Author Interview with Employer M6, Abu Dhabi, 9 July, 2019; Author Interview with Employer Mh8 and Mz8, Abu Dhabi, 29 August, 2019.

<sup>207</sup> Author Interview with Government Officer 2, Dubai, 7 August, 2019.

<sup>208</sup> Author Interview with Employer M6, Abu Dhabi, 9 July, 2019; Author Interview with Employer H5, Abu Dhabi, 21 July, 2019.

as one of the pillars of the Emirati society.<sup>209</sup> The law in and of itself does not hold as much weight and value to the employers in comparison to their personal and religious convictions. The employers appealed to a language and beliefs they resonated with to justify their employment practices and attitudes concerning domestic workers as rights holder. However, it is apparent that these influences are not entirely effective for employers to recognise domestic workers as deserving rights holders. Nonetheless, relying on the moral power of the globally circulating ‘human rights’ discourse appeared to be insufficient to convey the importance of granting domestic workers their rights as outlined in the Domestic Workers Law of 2017. Rather, employing a cultural mediation strategy of vernacularisation where claims are framed in a way that resonates with the cultural and moral attitudes that inform the larger society would be a more effective method to translate rights-based concepts.<sup>210</sup> This claim was further affirmed by a government officer, he expressed that this is still a work in progress but that is important to make sure the Emirati society understands the value of human rights but it can only be achieved in a way that is translatable to them as it still a rhetoric that is lacking.

### *Role of the Government*

The restrictions on the right to assembly and to unionise limits bottom-up initiatives in the UAE; there are limited spaces for dialogue and communication on matters related to the domestic works sector. During the interviews with a government officer, it was evident that a top-down approach is the most feasible and appropriate method to overcome the challenges and rights violations faced by domestic workers. Some recent initiatives taken by the government included gather students from secondary schools and universities on International Labour Day and organised events for them to interact with labourers.<sup>211</sup> Moreover, in some

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<sup>209</sup>UAE Constitution.

<sup>210</sup>Merry, *Human Rights & Gender Violence: Translating International Law into Local Justice*; Koh et al., “Cultural mediation through vernacularization: framing rights claims through the day-off campaign for migrant domestic workers in Singapore,” 89-104.

<sup>211</sup>Author Interview with Government Officer 2, Dubai, 7 August, 2019.

schools they implemented “helper appreciation day”; they organise events and appreciation ceremonies for the students’ domestic workers.<sup>212</sup> Although these initiatives did not specifically address domestic workers’ rights or labour rights in general, they are a step forward in altering perceptions of migrant workers and for society to view them as more than just workers and rather as individuals.

Furthermore, the government officer explained the development of new mechanisms such as the establishment of the public prosecution and specialised judicial departments in the Court of First Instance to investigate crimes against domestic workers.<sup>213</sup> With this new development he claimed that the domestic worker is “humanised” in front of the court; with these changes, they’re given a “sense of individuality, a sense of personhood, she is a person, she represents herself, you know she’s not this body that’s being controlled through the employer. There is more of a humanisation in terms of the legal aspects of it and the law context.”<sup>214</sup> This development is reflective of Merry’s concept of *hybridity*. She claimed that vernacularisation can take form through the production of new hybrid concepts that merge concepts of human rights with local developments and institutions.<sup>215</sup>

## 5.6 Concluding Remarks

This chapter presents several key findings: (1) there is a lack of recognition of domestic work as ‘real work’, (2) there is a lack of awareness of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017, (3) most employers hold their moral convictions at a higher ground than the law; in a sense the law is toothless, and (4) ‘rights-based’ language is a modern phenomenon that does not yet resonate with Emirati society. These findings support this study’s claim that most Emirati

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<sup>212</sup>Author Interview with Employer S3 and F3, Abu Dhabi, 26 June, 2019.

<sup>213</sup>Author Interview with Government Officer 2, Dubai, 7 August, 2019; Gulf News, “New department to tackle crimes against domestic workers in UAE”, March 2018, <https://gulfnews.com/uae/government/new-department-to-tackle-crimes-against-domestic-workers-in-uae-1.2184185>

<sup>214</sup>Author Interview with Government Officer 2, Dubai, 7 August, 2019.

<sup>215</sup>Merry, “Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle,” 38-51.



employers do not view domestic workers as working rights bearers, however, the employers often referred to their moral convictions to validate their attitudes towards domestic workers.

## **Chapter 6: Looking to the Future**

This chapter briefly highlights the implications of the study and suggests both bottom up and top down recommendations to improve social awareness of domestic workers' rights and consequently employers' translation and implementation of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017 into their households.

### **6.1 Implications of the Study**

To begin with, this study argues that most Emirati employers do not view domestic workers as rights holders and consequently not deserving of human dignity. There are various factors which contribute to the employers' lack of recognition of domestic workers as rights holders, including the lack of awareness of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017 by employers and their indifference on the value of the law. One of the reasons is that there is a clear information asymmetry amongst the employers, domestic workers, and recruitment agencies. However, given the pervasiveness of the "Khadama dependency syndrome" new awareness approaches in this regard need to address employers' lack of knowledge concerning the Domestic Workers Law of 2017 and changes in the legal framework. For example, programmes such as mandatory workshops for employers to complete before hiring a live-in domestic worker would dismantle any discrepancy in the employers' lack of awareness of the law.

Moreover, the findings of this study point to a disjunction between the employers employment practices, especially concerning the 'rest day', and their beliefs of domestic workers as deserving of their right to a 'rest day'. Campaigns should address practices and attitudes that violate the rights of domestic workers even those perceived by the majority of employers to be normative and acceptable. This relates to the need to employ a cultural

mediation strategy of vernacularisation that frames the rights of domestic workers in a way that resonates with moral beliefs that resonate with the Emirati society.

As the findings indicated, the concept of ‘rights-based’ language is a modern phenomenon in the UAE; it would not be resonate with the Emirati society. Thus, more attention must be placed on familiarising employers and society in general with this concept , but it can only be achieved in a way that is translatable to them. Future studies by both academics and the Ministry of Human Resources and Emiratisation (MoHRE) must explore ways that this can be best achieved within the cultural and religious constraints that the Emirati society is built on.

A multifaceted approach is needed in order to address the socio-cultural and legal factors that influence the attitudes and practices of Emiratis concerning domestic workers, specifically their ability to exercise their rights, the value of their work, and their recognition as deserving rights holders. With the restrictions on the formation of trade unions, labour unions, or any other organization that focuses on the issue of rights, there needs to be feasible initiatives by the UAE government to introduce a discourse on this matter targeting employers.

## **6.2 Recommendations**

### *6.2.1 Recommendations at an International Level*

- Ratification of the ILO Convention No. 189 of 2011 which would extend more basic labour rights to domestic workers in addition to the rights in the Domestic Workers Law of 2017.

### *6.2.2. Top Down Recommendations at a National Level*

- Implementation of Article 19 of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017 which indicates that the “Minister shall appoint enforcement agents with the mandate to...carry out inspections of recruitment agencies and carry out inspections of places of work and

workers' accommodation quarters subject to the provisions of Article 20 of the law.”<sup>216</sup>

This will ensure that employers and agencies who violate the law will be held accountable and portray that these matters are not taken lightly, and thus act as a deterrence.

- Development of a policy that obliges all recruitment agencies to operate under the direct supervision of MoHRE and to abide by the statutes and regulations set by the government and the Domestic Workers Law of 2017.
- Implementation of the Wages Protection System (WPS) in the domestic work industry.<sup>217</sup> This would allow MoHRE to monitor whether domestic workers are getting paid on time and that the amount they are receiving matches that on their contract.
- Implementation of mandatory workshop for employers to participate in before hiring a domestic worker and signing the contract. This should be developed by MoHRE in collaboration with TAD-BEER centres and also enforced on private recruitment agencies. These workshops should inform employers of the rights of domestic workers and their rights as employers too and ensure that they communicate the importance of preserving the domestic workers' integrity and dignity in their employment practices.
- Programmes and workshops developed by MoHRE to consult with domestic workers and incorporate their voices in policymaking and in efforts to combat social stereotypes concerning the value of their labour. This will allow for their concerns and suggestions to be addressed and to be taken into consideration when developing workshops targeted at the employers.

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<sup>216</sup>Federal Law no. (10) of 2017 On Domestic Workers, Article 19 & 20.

<sup>217</sup>WPS is an electronic salary transfer system set up by MoHRE that allows companies/institutions to pay workers' wages via banks, bureaux de change, and financial institutions approved and authorized to provide the service.

- Awareness campaigns by MoHRE regarding the issue of foreign female domestic workers and their protection. These campaigns would be developed specifically to the targeted audience, being the employers and the general public. They would depict the lived experiences of domestic workers through billboards and online media publications. MoHRE can collaborate with the [Dubai Foundation for Women and Children](#) who have worked on campaigning for the protection of children.<sup>218</sup>
- Campaigns by MoHRE to ensure both employers and domestic workers are aware of the special prosecution unit that handles specifically cases that involve the abuse of domestic workers. On the one hand, this will encourage victims to come forward and on the other hand, employers will have to respect their roles as duty bearers, especially knowing that any crime or infringement can lead to prosecution.

### *6.2.3 Bottom Up Recommendations*

- Recruitment agencies such as TAD-BEER and private agencies should develop community building programmes and activities for domestic workers to participate in and have access to. The recruitment agencies can work with local community groups such as The Filipino Social Club in Dubai, with local religious communities, and the respective embassies. This would allow domestic workers to meet and interact in a safe environment, provide them with support services, and means to interact with other members in the community.
- Media-based advocacy that provides a platform for domestic workers' voices to be heard and for them to share the realities of the job they perform. This can include discussion platforms on radio shows and various TV programmes that allow for mediated conversations on this matter.

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<sup>218</sup>Dubai Foundation for Women and Children, "Protect Childhood It's Precious Campaign", April 2019, <https://www.dfwac.ae/protect-childhood-its-precious-campaign>

- Raising awareness and amplifying domestic workers' voices through social media – social media platforms such as Instagram and Twitter have become very important tools in advocacy. With the immense following of 'social media influencers' on Instagram in the UAE, these influencers can use their voice and platform to raise awareness on the issues faced by domestic workers and the importance of their labour and rights. Moreover, Middle East based companies such as [Scene Arabia](#), podcasts networks such as [Kerning Cultures](#) which is based in the UAE and [Sekka Magazine](#) based in the UAE which all operate on Instagram can use their platform to amplify domestic workers' voices.
- Employing the cultural mediation strategy of vernacularisation to frame domestic workers' rights in a manner that resonates with the Emirati society. In Singapore this method was employed specifically concerning the 'day off'.<sup>219</sup> In the UAE, this can be done through civil society groups such as the [Dubai Foundation for Women and Children](#), [Takatof](#), and [The Sheikh Saud Bin Saqr al Qasimi Foundation for Policy Research](#).

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<sup>219</sup>“Civil society actors gained head- way by adapting the discourse on migrant rights to Singapore’s socio-cultural and political context in three ways: by reframing rights claims into a moral appeal; by appealing to the cost-benefit logics of Singaporean employers of migrant domestic workers; and by situating the provision of migrant labour protections as a relative market position.” - Koh et al., “Cultural mediation through vernacularization: framing rights claims through the day-off campaign for migrant domestic workers in Singapore,” 89-104.

## **Chapter 7: Concluding Remarks**

This study examined the socio-cultural and legal factors that influence the attitudes and practices of Emirati employers concerning domestic workers; the findings of this research reveal that most Emirati employers do not view migrant female domestic workers as rights holders.

The rooted history of hiring domestic help has evolved alongside the rapid modernisation of the UAE. High levels of disposable income, luxurious lifestyles, and increased participation of women in the workforce continue to be catalysts in the increasing dependency on domestic workers. Despite the ‘need’ for domestic workers, as was expressed by many participants, there is still a lack of recognition of the hard labour that is performed by these workers. Some participants claimed that domestic workers’ jobs are “doable” and that there are no hardships in the act of the work itself, yet they still referred to domestic workers as ‘necessity’. Moreover, there was a great discrepancy in the employment practices of employers in comparison to their views on domestic workers as deserving rights holders. The participants often attempted to sympathise with the domestic worker and place themselves in their shoes, however, again this was not reflected in their employment practices. They often alluded to the importance of domestic workers’ right to a rest day or to have her personal documents in her possession, but did not follow through in their practices. Additionally, this study has shown that employers tend to focus on the tangible and measurable factors with regards to the rights that domestic workers can exercise and enjoy, rather than understanding and recognising the hard and emotional labour that is required in domestic work.

Although the interviewees at TAD-BEER agencies and Government Officer 1 maintained that there is an increased awareness of the law, the participants revealed otherwise. There was a clear lack of awareness of the Domestic Workers Law of 2017 from the Emirati

employers; this can be attributed to the employers' indifference on the existence of the law. Instead, the employers often alluded to religious and personal morals to justify their conduct.

This study reveals that there is still a lot of work to be done in the UAE concerning domestic workers and their ability to exercise their rights as stipulated in the Domestic Workers Law of 2017. In order to ensure that domestic workers can exercise their rights there has to be greater accountability from the government and transparency from the employment agencies. Moreover, raising awareness on the value of domestic work and workers is essential. The social image of domestic workers continues to be tainted with racial stereotypes and as 'undesirable work.' Additionally, with domestic work being a highly feminised sector, the perceptions of Emirati employers are also indicative of the gendered roles and expectations in the household.

More research is needed on this matter, especially to fully understand the value of domestic work in the UAE. Addressing these issues can help facilitate employers' implementation and recognition of domestic workers' rights. Furthermore, considering the modern nature of 'rights-based' language, there needs to be more research on the best way to embed rights-based language in the Emirati society. This can then inform and facilitate future campaigns and employment agencies and translate these rights in a manner that resonates with people.



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## Appendix 1

Table 1: Demographic Breakdown of Emirati Employers

Employers	Nationality of Employers	Emirate	Educational Attainment Level	Age Group	Employment Status	Socioeconomic Status <sup>220</sup>	# of Children	DW Status	# of DW Employed
L1 (h) S1 (w)	Emirati	Abu Dhabi	Military Training Masters	50+	Employed (runs a consulting business) Retired	Upper Middle Class	2	Live in	2
U2 (h) A2 (w)	Emirati Omani	Abu Dhabi	Police Academy Bachelors	25-35	Employed (police) Employed (auditing)	Upper Middle Class	1	Live in	1
S3 (h) F3 (w)	Emirati Emirati	Abu Dhabi with roots in Sharjah	Military training & M.D. M.D.	50+	Retired Employed (dermatologist)	Upper Middle Class	4	Live in	2
J4 (h) H4 (w)	Emirati Moroccan	Abu Dhabi	Military Training Masters	50+ 35-50	Employed (army) Previously employed now Housewife	Middle Class	6	Live in	1
H5 (h) UK5 (w)	Emirati	Abu Dhabi	Military training High school	50+	Employed (consulting) Housewife	Upper Middle Class	3	Live in	2
N6 (h) M6 (w)	Emirati	Abu Dhabi (Al Shahamah)	Military Training Bachelors	50+	Employed (military PLC) Employed (social worker)	Middle Class	4	Live in	1
S7 (h) S (w)	Emirati/French Emirati/Scottish	Abu Dhabi with roots in Al Ain	Bachelors Bachelors	25-35	Employed (auditing) Previously employed now Housewife	Upper Middle Class	0	Live in	1
Mh8 (h) Mz8 (w)	Emirati	Abu Dhabi	Masters Masters	35-50	Employed (oil) Employed (oil)	Upper Middle Class	2	Live in	1
J9 (h) D9 (w)	Emirati	Abu Dhabi with roots in Dubai & Sharjah	Bachelors Bachelors	25-35	Employed (pilot) Employed (fitness instructor NYUAD)	Middle Class	0	Part-time	-

<sup>220</sup>Participants described the socioeconomic status they best identified with, they were not asked to share specifics on their income and finances.