

Afro-Emarati: a Unique Historical Experience

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Introduction

This paper is an attempt to highlight the assimilation of African slaves and the experience of slavery as expressed through their music and their newly evolved Afro-Emarati identity. It will compare the names of slaves with those of their masters and discuss the symbolic meanings and connotations of the social interactions between the two groups. An analysis of their daily interactions illustrates the indoctrination and the assimilation of Arabic and Islamic values and principles.

African slave trade corresponds to the demand for pearl divers on the Arabian side of the Persian Gulf. It provided coastal sheikhdoms and towns with a steady flow of slaves especially towards the end of the eighteenth century. The general recession in the world markets and Japan's introduction of cultured pearls resulting in a decline in the demand for natural pearls led to a gradual decrease of the African slave trade by the 1930s. It finally ceased to exist after the discovery of oil in the 1960s leaving behind a legacy of African slave music, traditions and social stratification.

The Assimilation of the African slave and the emergence of the Afro-Emirati

During the early years of the trade, the African slaves were converted to Islam, renamed and taught to communicate in Arabic. This indoctrination fulfilled the fundamental requirements to penetrate the Gulf tribal system. As polytheists, slaves were considered to be lacking morals and basic hygiene. Therefore their conversion into Islam ensured their acceptance of the concept of lawful « halal » (Halal meat: animals slaughtered and meat prepared according to Muslim religious requirements). Tribesmen feared the unhygienic conditions of non Muslim slaves particularly with regard to the Prophet's teachings on animal slaughter and food preparation. (Fisher 1970: 46)

Majority of African slaves were locally bought or exchanged and included those brought to Dubai for menial work. They were made to work as pearl divers, shipbuilders and longshoremen. Additionally, the « Baluch » from the southern Persian coasts were purchased or inherited to be enslaved. African slaves were an integral part of the households of rulers and wealthy people. They lived within, or in close proximity to their masters' houses since the 19th century. Many tribesmen and their slaves occupied the al-« Shandaghah » (rulers and tribesmen's quarters) during the 1940s. When a slave went in search of pearls his family stayed back with his master until his return. However, if the slave lived in a dwelling separated from that of his master, his family moved into their masters' house until they are reunited with him at end of the diving season. (Ramadan 1978: 96). Thus, the African slaves did not develop as a racial minority established in small communities like the merchants from Bahrain, Persia or India or the cheap « Baluch » labourers from southern Persia.

The pearling industry prolonged slavery. Regardless of economic conditions and shifts in labour market trends, some Gulf families manipulated the illiterate divers' debt logs in order to keep good divers on their rosters. In 1924 Harrison observed that during his 7 year stay in Bahrain he had not met a single diver who was free of debt (Harrison 1924: 80). For instance, Musa bin Jangir was indebted to a nukhada (pearl diving ship captain) for Rs.900. To get the diver back, the nukhada agreed to discount Rs.400 and Musa was warned that he had either to pay the outstanding Rs.500 or to work for the « nukhada » in the usual way. (IOR /15/1/216)

Beyond their inability to repay their loans, those who attempted to escape slavery and fraudulent diving logs were referred to as "fugitive". Slave holders sent their slaves to dive and did not share the profits with them. Even after the decline of pearling, slave holders continued to benefit from the income of their slaves in other industries. Such was the case of cAtiq bin Nasib who, in the 1950s was taken by his holder to Kuwait to work in the oil fields. His master collected all his earnings. (IOR/15/2/1840)

Pearl diving also had a tremendous impact on the economy and the social structure. The growth of the pearling industry resulted in a non-traditional community comprised of tribesmen, merchants, captains, financiers and divers. Slave divers were the least empowered and yet the most desired. The most valuable ones were those who dared to dive in deep and cloudy waters. They sold for more than Rs.1000 (Lorimer 1986: 2228).

In order to endure their oppression the divers and seamen brought their music along with them, a way to maintain their sanity and identity. The combination of pearl diving and off-season music ultimately enriched the various African art forms which are still practised today. During the 1940s African slave divers took their « tanbourah » (lyre) on board the diving ship and often brought back interesting insights to the non-travelling musician.

Some divers upon returning from the diving season went directly to the headquarters of the musical groups, even before seeing their wives and children; such was their nostalgia for music, a phenomenon that was not observed with non-African divers. Assimilation means abandoning part of one's being. Generations later, slaves were born Muslims on Arabian soil and had no collective memory of Africa. Moreover, a slave born in the Gulf learnt to be both a slave aware of his social status and a tribesman. The fusion between the two cultures, Gulf/Arabic and African, produced musical expressions clearly rooted in African social memory and renewed by the Diaspora and finally appropriated by Gulf Arabs.

Enslavement is both a physical and an ideological process. Mark Twain very aptly states: ...when a country enslaves a people, the first necessity is to make the world feel that the people enslaved are subhuman. The next effort is to make his fellow countrymen believe that the enslaved man is inferior; and then, the worst cut of all is to make that man believe himself inferior. (Davis 1998:5)

Despite this perception of inferiority why did tribesmen accept the assimilation of slaves more than that of any other group? Many early population references indicate that in the Trucial States "most of the existing slaves, who are almost all of African origin, have become more or less members of the families to whom they belong" (Hay 1959:39). As far as statistics are concerned, does this mean that slaves were counted as members of the tribe or of the ruling families that owned them?

While the African male population was the most important labour force in the pearling industry little is known about the number of African females working in the domestic arena. African women indeed were domestic servants, nannies and in some cases also concubines al-seriyah. The mortality rate of divers at sea was high. And so they entrusted their families to their holders before leaving for the season. However, this was not without apprehension. If they returned safe and sound, they were often confronted with news of unexpected death or sale of family members, and/or of adultery with their spouses, daughters or other female members of their families.

Slave children were initiated at an early age into the system and were instructed to be submissive, docile and faithful. In the initial days of bondage, the slaves were made to undertake common daily tasks used as a means to train them for subservience. The slaves were forbidden from calling their holders by the first name. Instead they called them cammi, which literally means the father's brother. Tribal customs view the paternal

uncle as a loyal master whose tribal values rise above all in defending their honour. And as will be discussed later, slaves were called « khal » or khalah which literally means maternal uncle or aunt. In addition to having a derogatory meaning, the term also connotes a certain condescendence towards the woman's family.

The social norms demanded that slaves kiss their master's forehead. Older ones also kissed the foreheads of the master's children. Apart from a few exceptions, the age and wisdom of slaves did not command any respect from the tribesmen. They rarely stood up, as customs required, when greeting old or young slaves.

On the streets, slaves were expected to walk a few steps behind their owners. They were not allowed to call their holders by name. In most cases the slave was expected to eat only after their holders were through with meals, unless specifically asked by the holder to join him. Whenever the holder appeared, the slave would stop what he/she was doing awaiting permission to continue or an order to leave. Slaves did not speak in the presence of their holders unless spoken to. In the verbal interactions the slave hardly went beyond "labayk" implying 'yes' or 'at your command'. Holders were addressed as "long living" (tawil al-cumr) by the slaves (Lienhardt 2001: 196).

Limiting speech illustrates the role of speech in the power dynamics in that society. Language as speech is power, and it is closely connected to hierarchies within a particular locality. In Dubai, the tribal society controlled knowledge by monopolising orally transmitted traditions, and presenting their own version of history. This presentation wrongly homogenises the population and their social life and marginalises the uniqueness of the slaves' experience.

In Dubai much as in the entire region, regardless of the age, wisdom or loyalty of a slave, in the eyes of the tribe he never overcame his servile origin. It is only in recent years that children or descendants of slaves have acquired recognition. Historically the tribal system did not admit the rise of slave descendants to ruling positions. For example there were two historical appointments, one in 1924 when Bakhit bin Sacid was appointed « Wali » of Dibba, Sharjah territory (Heard-Bey 1982:89) and the other in 1937 when Barut, ruler of Kalba, Sharjah territory, became a regent (Zahlan 1978: 186-7). However their authority was questioned by the tribal culture and they were withdrawn from power shortly after.

Slaves often actually took on the role of tribal members and maintained the tribal code of honour and ethics. The loyalty and integrity of some resulted in life sacrifices. Mubarak, an African slave belonging to Manic bin Rashid, cousin of the ruler of Dubai and key person in Dubai's 1938 reform movement, actively defended his master when the latter was trapped in his house. During the period of Mani's exile and even after his death, Mubarak regularly visited Sanca bint Manic, his daughter. Mubarak died in the 1970s succumbing to injuries incurred earlier. His loyalty and bravery are still celebrated among tribesmen and slave communities alike (Jumcah, 1990: Dubai (field notes).

The assimilation in the above case was not partial – in fact it was total. Slaves who were held by Baharnah (Shiite population from Bahrian) converted to their holders' sect and became Shiites. It was their demonstration of total integration into the system and its values. It must be noted that the Baharnah did not have a tribal culture. So while their slaves assimilated the Arab Muslim Shiite culture, they also regularly attended African rituals and ceremonies and adopted the tribal social values and codes.

Oral culture has preserved the story of a slave who took revenge on his holder's killer. In 1926 Sultan bin Zayed, ruler of Abu Dhabi (1922 – 1926) was killed in the presence of his slave, by his brother Saqr bin Zayed the ruler of the emirate (1926-1928). In 1928, with the help of the deceased's exiled nephew, and supported by al-Manasir (a prominent

tribe), the slave attacked and killed Saqr. (Zahlan1978: 44)

Slaves also supported their holders in resisting foreign invasions and military aggressions. For instance, many were part of tribal military units, and sided with their masters against an increasing British interest and presence in the Gulf region. Some historians maintain that this was one of the reasons why Britain wanted to limit the inflow of slaves to the Gulf.

At the core of the relationship between the slave and the master was a mutual economic and psychological dependence. An ideal slave was one who was productive, content and most importantly accepted his/her fate. Nonetheless slaves were aware of their exploitation. For the slave, diving was not a matter of passion or tribal honour. It represented the realities of life or death which got reflected in the pearl diving music.

Tribes disassociated themselves from and had no regard for African culture. While the tribesmen accepted the slaves for the financial stability they provided for them and their families, they were not concerned with the social and psychological needs of their slaves. (Lienhardt 2001:162)

Holders sold members of a slave family with little regard for its impact on the family concerned. These relationships generated feelings of love and hate. Slave runaways in a bid to escape the diving season and the harassment of their masters, were a frequent phenomenon. This represented a financial burden for the holders. Slavery persisted in the 1930s because slave owners retained the descendants who applied for the British manumission. Although difficult, other slaves chose bondage over poverty and stayed with their masters at least ensured of boarding and lodging (Zahlan 1978:8).

In Dubai tribesmen claimed that fugitive slaves were the cause of their indebtedness. However, slaves often endured drought, famine or loss in the family and this contributed to bonding them further with the tribesmen. Some tribesmen did not hesitate to remind their slaves of the value and financial security they provided. This justified the slaves' incorporation into the social patterns of their masters, and made them an integral part of society and of the owner's actual family.(Fisher 1970:100), Mechanisms for communal and psychological support unfolded within the slave communities as a result of systems which demanded free labour and neglected their emotional needs.. Therefore, preservation of the African identity became fundamental, generating mechanisms and spaces where slaves could express themselves freely. (Duaib 1982:43)

Music in slave communities was an expressive, healing and joyful art form similar to the blues music among slave communities in North America. The songs reflected the slave's reality. Their daily spirituals were the purest expression of their true being (Duaib 1982:44). In North America their expressions outlived the experience of slavery and re-emerged in the post-slavery era. Their desire for freedom transpired through religious and inventive lyrics. Their religious practices were related to their daily life, work, family, their need to sabotage and to escape. Consequently, these practices lost their essence in post-slavery times and merged with the wider definition of spirituality. This evolution marked the transition from African spirituals to African music.(Davis 1998:5)

Similarly in the Gulf, the African collective memory was best expressed through spirituals that glorified the all-embracing sacred universe. Spirituals played a vital role in maintaining optimism and hope in the slave community. Sacred music was vital in preserving the African cultural memory, and ultimately remained with the slaves and gave expression to a powerful and consistent yearning for freedom (Mubarak& Al-Nassay 2002: Dubai (field notes).

Slaves were allowed to engage in their dances and rituals. This is explained by the confidence of the tribes in their perception of their own superiority over the slaves. . Although engaging the slaves initially represented a threat to Gulf Arabs, the latter soon

realised that slaves were a minority. Although oppressed, there were no recorded incidents of slave revolt or physical attacks on their masters. Slave rebellions took the form of sabotage and escape and are expressed in lyrics. . Such acts further worsened the gap between slaves and their holders (Scott 1995:176& 182-3) and added fuel to the security/insecurity dynamics of their fragile relationship.

Slaves took shelter in African music and spirituals. On numerous occasions, tribesmen and/or religious folk condemned it as pagan and accused ritual practitioners of being atheists. Nonetheless, African music survived thanks to its functions. Many tribesmen as well understood the need for such arts although they preached otherwise. Spirituals and labour songs sung exclusively by slaves confirm their focus on their collective desire to abolish slavery.

Since the early 20th century slaves increasingly settled in the Gulf and made it their permanent home. Attachment to the remnants of their African roots remained an important element of their group identity while they progressively adjusted to their new Gulf environment. The African slaves, unlike other historical immigrant groups, such as Indians, Persians and to some extent the « Baluch », did not establish separate and exclusive networks within Gulf societies and were not able to return to their home country whenever it suited them. The slaves' assimilation of the social dimensions of the Gulf was a result of their physical detachment from their home. The longing for freedom heard in their songs is simply a nostalgic reference to what was remembered by the earlier groups. Logically, therefore, their assimilation into Gulf traditions and life style was a choice, and with the passage of time they evolved and adapted to their social status in the Gulf (Scott 1995:100-1).

By the very nature of their position, the only means for slaves to gain recognition was to get rid of their unique cultural traits, especially those that associated them with Africa. Thesiger observed that many slaves were enlisted among the ruler's attendants and that there were a few who were envied for the great power and prestige that they possessed. Some were the ruler's adopted brothers or his sons, many of whom had Arab blood and were almost indistinguishable from the local tribesmen in colour and appearance. However, while it was common for Arabs to take a slave girl as a concubine it was death for a slave to touch freeborn tribal women. To save their honour and social status, members of the tribe would pursue the couple and execute them, even if they were legally married (Thesiger 1977:69).

Some slaves saw themselves as Arabs in all aspects of personality and behaviour that are predominant in Arab and tribal traditions. For example, generosity is an assumed trait of the ruler and members of his family, whereby a guest of the ruling family is treated with great respect and honour. Similarly, slaves indulged in exhibiting wealth and hospitality to those visiting their homes. It should be remembered that slaves had neither time nor place to socialise outside their master's circle; therefore their standards were set and directly influenced by the Sheikhs. This is also true with regard to the speech patterns and mastery of the Arabic language by the slaves. In the early 1970s a slave who spoke with authority, exhibited wealth and relished material possessions was boosted by the ego of his holder; this mimicking is thus based on the perception of superiority embedded in the tribal system. Slaves assumed their master's protection and extended their superior behaviour to all places of social and professional interactions (Lienhardt 2001:200).

The local expression 'the slave of the shaikh is shaikh', « khadim al-shaikh shaikh » evolved to express this phenomenon. (Lienhardt 2001:200) Such psychological implication put strains on the way slaves thought about and viewed themselves in relation to their masters, which supports Nietzsche's analysis of slave/master relationships. Conceptually, it describes someone looking from below upwards with a feeling of inferiority to another person or group above it. There exists a combination of

love and hate in those looking upwards although the criteria by which the slave measures himself change constantly. The slave loves these categories because he would like to resemble his master; he hates the master because his chances of resembling him are remote (Magubane 1989:16).

While the slaves in the Gulf are racially African they identify themselves as ethnic Arabs, although indigenous tribesmen identify them with their past slave status. Such association results in prejudice and discrimination, in which many African descendants feel socially and institutionally oppressed and excluded from high government positions. Nonetheless, slaves were assimilated into Dubai's society through daily interaction and were distinguished solely by their racial identity. On all social and cultural levels they viewed themselves with pride as being natives to whom land and heritage could be traced. Slaves assumed that their assimilation rewarded them a unique place in society, though unlike the Persians or the Indians, the slaves lacked political strength and connection with their motherland. In the eyes of the tribesmen, Africans slaves did not constitute a threat to the existing tribal structure.

After independence from the British and the establishment of the 1971 union, some former slaves, « Baluch », Persians and Shiites reconfigured themselves as a new social group. Most became naturalised citizens with basic rights but with little opportunity to comprehend the changes. They were occasional labourers who performed various tasks; however, in contemporary society they have become obsolete. Some still work in jobs which carry heavy social stigma such as night guards, bank messengers and ministry janitors, whereas in the past they were an integral part of the everyday commercial activities of the emirate as divers, ship builders and common labourers. This group currently benefits from welfare funding and is frequently ridiculed as being useless and unwanted. They still live in traditionally-grouped areas, such as al-Satwa, Hour al-cAnz, al-Manamah and al-Qusais.

Following the discovery of oil and the subsequent formation of the Union, an incompatible labour force streamed into the UAE. Immigrants came from Iran, the Philippines, India, Pakistan, Africa and various parts of the Arab world, along with a small number of Europeans and Americans. Dubai's need for cheap labour and expertise to build its infrastructure outweighed the social disruption caused by the inflow of these new communities. Many of these individuals were attracted to Dubai because of its better living standards, compared with those in their countries of origin. Most were single men who were given work permits during the 1970s. However, illegal migration and bogus work permits enabled immigrants to enter in massive numbers and to stay indefinitely in the UAE.

Modern Dubai is more multi-ethnic than ever been before. The current situation is alarming, and the new social makeup is likely to lead to the progressive demise of the local culture. Dubai's historical community came to terms with the immigration of foreign groups from the 1960s, realising that they were becoming a constantly-shrinking minority and that this process could be kept at bay by minimising social interactions with these immigrant groups. The rapidly diminishing numbers of UAE nationals that make up Dubai's local community clearly indicate the tremendous impact of immigrants and their effect on Dubai's cultural heritage.

The oil boom radically transformed Dubai's economy and entailed a process that articulated national identity; by naturally involving all historical communities. The granting of UAE nationality and passports was the starting point of this process. An individual's identity determines that person's sense of belonging to a certain family, clan or tribe. In turn this identity helps the individual to acquire a social status and obtain territorial, economic and political advancement. Thus emerged a common trend to use "al" before the last name (such as al-Futtaim instead of bin Futtaim), since people began to affiliate with prominent indigenous tribes. These names are printed on official

documents as well as on a UAE passport. This connection is still one of the main distinguishing elements that sustain the existence of the old tribal system in the modern UAE where the tribe remains socially and genealogically intact (Hurreiz 2002:26).

Naming, Subordination and Tribal Superiority

Names, titles and adjectives describing personal qualities and traits are very common in Arab society. The name "Kaleb" or Dog was given to an ancestor of our Prophet Mohammed (Peace Be Upon Him) whose thus came to be called Kaleb bin Murrah bin Kaab. This name was intended to imply 'abundance'. Names such as "Dog", "Wolf", "Lion», "Thunder", "Stone" and others were common among Arab children in the pre as well in the post Islamic eras. Meanwhile, slaves enjoyed positive named like "Rabah", "Murjan" Coral, "Fairuz" Trquise, Yaqoot" Ruby, etc. History books stress the fact that the primers names were meant to instil fear and frenzy in the enemies' mind in wartime. Arabs called their slaves names they consider pleasing and optimistic to enrich their immediate environment.

In the pre-oil era, African slaves were considered people of 'low' culture. The tribe sought to maintain its identity by distinguishing itself from what was alien, an approach that is better illustrated in the tribal naming system. Tribesmen monopolised particular names and passed them on from one generation to the next. In many cases the passing down of names was determined long before the child's birth. Once a male child was born he was given his deceased father or grandfather's name. He could also literally be called 'the old man', « al-shaibah ». This transferred the identity and personal qualities of the deceased to the new born member.

Certain names such as Maktum, Hashr and Manic have circulated exclusively within Dubai's ruling family. Other names like Rashid, Suhayl, Buti, Khalifah and Hamdan are common names among prominent tribes and the well-to-do. There are no tribal claims on names like Sacid, Muhammad and Ahmed, which can be used freely by a wide array of the population.

Names prolong the tribe and sustain its identity. The ability to perpetuate the most crucial component of individual and collective identity is a sign of social prestige and wealth. It is the same with the concept of blood and is obviously closely connected to it; names are signs of social status and economic prominence. A name possesses the same qualities as blood which is reinforced through interfamily marriages. The circulation of blood dictates the necessity to repeat and carry on certain names because they exemplify a burden and a family obligation and reflect a societal demand.

Naming carries an expectation in terms of treatment which is related to the position of the deceased person who is 'resurrected' by it. The implication is quite interesting in the case of slaves. A slave naming his child after the master is normally unacceptable. Names came with a responsibility. It limited the ways in which slaves disciplined their children and the holder could have considered that this flouted his authority. The burden placed on the child was even greater as he was expected to behave in a particular way regardless of his individual personality.

Slaves were allowed to carry the names of their tribal holders as an identification of ownership. For instance, Bilal Hashr, Faraj bin Manic and Matar Shamma were well known slaves in Dubai. Their real names were Bilal al-Mas, Faraj cAbd al-karim and Matar Sacid; their acquired names such as Hashr, bin Manic and Shamma were used to identify them by the names of their masters or mistresses. To this day the offspring of these slaves are identified in oral tradition with their forefather's holders.

African slaves were often ridiculed for using tribal names for their children. They generally had no choice in the naming of their offspring as it was customary for the

slaves' holder to name new-born slaves. Slaves were usually given noticeable and uncommon names. The slaves' naming paradigm suggests that upon conversion to Islam the original name was replaced by an Arabic name which had a religious connotation. The names of older generations of slave families are usually of African origin or have a religious connotation. However, the naming pattern of the first generation of born slaves carried an optimistic note and provided hope for freedom such as Wanderer Darwish, Delighted Farhan, Salvation Faraj, Manumitted cAtiq, Happiness Surur, Freed Sabil, Loved Mahbub, Blessed Mubarak etc. When slaves were able to name their own children they followed tribal guidelines but not tribal names, by immortalising their own African ancestors. Hence, individuals of African, black and slave origin up to the present can be identified as such through their names.

Often slaves were not addressed by their proper names in a bid to 'belittle' them. A Shaikh, a dignitary and a slave may have carried the same name, for instance, Jumcah, but the slave would be addressed or referred to, as 'Jamcan', 'Jamcuh' , or 'Jamuc', which are diminutives. Socially, derivatives were used only when a slave was young. Proper pronunciation of one's name was used as a token of respect. This was not the case with slaves who, regardless of their age, bore nicknames or diminutives that would be used until death. The tribesmen's attitude towards slaves can be compared to that of adults towards children. Such attitudes embodied all the characteristics of infantile rationale. Therefore, slaves were spoken to in a condescending manner regardless of their intelligence and intellectual calibre or command of the Arabic language. Although this type of discriminatory behaviour was casual and unintentional it was an emphatic reminder to the slave of his inferior status.

Some slave names were given in relation to the time of day, year and month of birth or were based on religious and social events. For example, Musabh, Ghabish , Dawi, Hilal (time of the day and lunar names), Khamis, Jumcah, Sabt , Thani , Rubic (days of the week), Rajab , Shacban, Ramadan, Muharram, Safar (months of the year), and cId and Mecraj (religious celebration). There was a direct correlation between slave identity and social order, reflecting tribal practices and values that were often rooted in the Islamic tradition. Discouraging slaves from using names reserved by the tribe sustained the naming patterns that have been highlighted. Therefore, the slave saw no hope for elevation in his social status. To insult slaves, tribesmen used proverbs such as 'cAnbr is Bilal's brother' cAnbr akhu Bilal, to stress that a slave is a slave. The usage of a proper name to offend others created a social division between tribal and slave names.

Among the circulating names of tribeswomen one observes the same naming pattern. For instance, slave women are called Zacfur diminutive of Zacfaranah or Saffron, Gazalah or gazelle, Qmashah or pearl etc. Some slave women were given names describing their personal traits or resemblance to animals. For instance, a slave woman is known as Lahus, or Licker meaning she likes to lick her food, another is called Garmushah, meaning a small falcon that she resembles, yet another is called Diyayuh, diminutive of chicken indicating a habit of sitting for long periods like a hen would on her eggs. The list goes on. These names or associations are absent from the tribeswomen's domain; however, there has been a chronological increase and integration of names such as Hissah, Latifah, and cAlia, observable in Dubai's public response to and association with the ruling family. Other common names among Dubai's tribeswomen are Maitha, Shamsah, Rozah, cAdijah, Hissah, Shaikhah, Hamdah, Mediyah.

From this perspective, identity and social order are linked in a cerebral or substantial perception of who and what a person is. That person is also able to evaluate his sense of self and how others view him. Therefore, a person's self-motivation is impelled by his place in society and by the potential for conducting himself according to a set role. Therefore, identity is a flexible reflection of self. It is a fluid process of change through time as an individual acquires abilities and accumulates a record of achievements and failures (Fitch 1987:38).

Conclusion

It is safe to conclude that the legacy of slavery and enslavement of African people has left a tremendous impact on the culture and history of Dubai and the UAE in general. Slave trade and slavery is a sensitive matter in both UAE and the Gulf as it can be construed in such a way as to cast a disparaging perspective on the past endeavours of rulers and, more generally, on the nobles and dignitaries of the society. No accurate historical accounts of slavery have yet been produced since locals are not seriously interested in the topic. The reason for such marginalisation is the perception that slavery is directly related to the conscience.. Acknowledging slavery as part of one's history jeopardises the presentation and the perception of self. Many scholars have constructed history in accordance with the current political and social norms.

Studies into the assimilation and the socio-historical aspects of the enslavement experience revealed that slaves adapted and remained loyal to their holders. African slaves' status changed with the economic prosperity after the discovery of oil and the formation of the union. Although they were not officially emancipated but their liberation was rather implied and accepted by the newly introduced economic and political systems. Therefore, examining aspects of African slaves' interactions with the old system and the new one is vital in capturing two evolving realities.

Today, descendents of slaves are still socially and economically attached to the Gulf rulers. Therefore, a serious discussion of this subject dents the image of gulf countries on many fronts such as religious, human and civil rights. Consequently, a defensive attitude was adopted by many scholars who believed that any discussion of this chapter of African existence in the Gulf's history would lead to distortion and embarrassment. Minimal attention is therefore paid to slavery, because of an overall feeling of "why should we remind ourselves of horrible past occurrences, aren't we glad it's over?" The historiography of sensitive topics relies on particular individuals who have personal interests at stake. An example of this is Shaikh Sultan al-Qasimi, the present ruler of Sharjah, who attempted to free his family history from the stigma of "piracy". His doctoral dissertation, complete with historical facts regarding al-Qawasim tribe, challenged the British presence in the Gulf in the early 19th century.

The enslavement of Africans brought about the prosperity and the cultural legacies enjoyed in the Arab world, their stories, narratives and history are absent from forums of dialogue and open discussions. Discussing and writing about slavery and the slave trade ensures the recognition that these Africans contributed immensely in the creation and the sustainability of this region. Breaking the code of silence around this neglected topic is the first step in providing an accurate account of their vital contribution to cultural settings, music and world views of the host society.

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