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## Commodification of Gender in the Context of Economic Globalization in United Arab Emirates

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### Extended Abstract

This research critically examines the phenomenon of gender commodification and the expansion of the sex work economy within the context of the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) rapid economic development. This specific model of development, contingent upon the swift influx of capital and expatriate labor, has engendered a complex societal structure. This paper posits that sex work in Dubai is a structural manifestation of prevailing macroeconomic priorities, globalizing forces, and the inherent contradictions embedded within the theoretical paradigms guiding economic policymaking. The commodification of gender in the UAE, set against the panorama of economic globalization-as is typical in other rapidly industrializing nations-is accompanied by intricate and often paradoxical econom-

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ic, social, and cultural impacts. While the UAE is globally recognized as a premier nexus for commerce and tourism, its engagement with economic globalization has not only unlocked significant opportunities for investment and aggregate growth but has also precipitated profound transformations across its social and cultural spheres. The commodification of gender in the UAE presents distinct challenges owing to the nation's conservative Islamic culture. In contrast to other nations that have more overtly utilized sex work to attract tourism, the UAE has adopted a markedly more cautious strategy. Furthermore, economic globalization has facilitated the emergence and propagation of novel gender identities and representations within the Emirates. Although the UAE has consistently sought to capitalize on global economic opportunities for advancement, this trajectory has simultaneously introduced complexities such as gender commodification and its attendant cultural repercussions. This study concentrates on clarifying the multi-dimensional consequences of economic globalization on gender and sex work within the UAE, directly addressing the inquiry: How has economic globalization influenced the commodification of gender in the UAE? The central hypothesis of this case study is formulated as follows: Economic globalization, driven by the imperative for profit maximization and capital accumulation, has instigated the commodification of persons and the objectification of gender within the economic domain, thereby creating the structural conditions conducive to the prevalence of sex work as a means of establishing a capital-attracting and employment-generating industry.

Economic globalization in the UAE, one of the most dynamic economies in the Gulf region, has exerted manifold influences across social, cultural, and gender stratifications. To dissect these shifts, this study adopts the theoretical lenses of Realism, Neoliberalism, and Structuralism from International Political Economy (IPE). These three perspectives are optimally suited to investigate the changes induced by globalization, particularly regarding gender dynamics and individual commodification in the UAE context.

From a Realist standpoint, state behavior is fundamentally driven by the pursuit of national power preservation. Sex work may function, albeit perhaps unintentionally, by satisfying the demands of the international con-

sumer base and maintaining an “attractive” milieu for foreign investment, thereby securing capital inflow and, consequently, national power.

Liberalism prioritizes individual liberties and bodily autonomy. Under this framework, sex work, where it stems from voluntary choice, can be conceptualized as an individual economic decision aimed at income generation within a deregulated market. The primary friction emerges between the tenets of liberal market freedom and the constraints imposed by established traditional/Islamic legal norms.

Adopting a Structuralist view, globalization is understood not as a process governed solely by state or corporate actors, but as unfolding within a complex structural matrix of power dynamics and socio-economic norms that actively shape those very actors. Structuralism illuminates the deepest strata of exploitation, directly linking sex work to the operational logic of Neoliberal Capitalism. This economic model engenders profound cleavages in class, gender, and ethnicity. The exploitation of migrant workers, especially those originating from the Global South, under precarious conditions is a direct outcome of these systemic global inequalities. A Structuralist solution mandates deep, transformative institutional reform.

The research findings underscore that due to the paramount importance states place on conforming to global economic integration-and their efforts to leverage globalization’s capacities, particularly through creating attractive incentives and bolstering infrastructure-capital has become the decisive variable. Maximizing capital attraction necessitates diversifying the means of production, including labor, which extends to women across various sectors. Integrating the theoretical synthesis of Realism, Liberalism, and Structuralism, this analysis demonstrates how the phenomenon of gender has been instrumentalized by the UAE within this globalizing process. The prevalence of sex work in the UAE, particularly Dubai, transcends being a mere social anomaly; it is a direct reflection of strategic economic policies and globalizing trajectories. The nation’s development-centric policies, focusing on foreign direct investment, tourism, and economic diversification, are engineered to secure maximal profitability with minimal governmental interference. Within this context, migrant labor, particularly female labor, is

harnessed as a quantifiable economic input. Despite the UAE's official repudiation of sex work, the underlying market-driven economic structure, exacerbated by lacunae in regulatory and enforcement mechanisms, provides an underlying substratum where this activity can indirectly thrive.

At the macro level, UAE policies exemplify a development paradigm where the imperatives of economic competition and increased global market share systematically outweigh considerations of social welfare and human dignity. This model, reliant on attracting international finance, facilitating tourism, and maximizing the deployment of migrant labor, not only perpetuates social divisions but actively intensifies gender and class disparities. Crucially, the UAE's status as a pivotal hub in the global economic system has diminished the efficacy of regulatory and oversight mechanisms against market pressures. Under these conditions, sex work, as an unavoidable byproduct of global economic integration, has proliferated in the absence of countervailing policy controls and protective frameworks.

From a policy analysis vantage point, the UAE's deepening dependency on market economics and international engagement, absent the cultivation of robust civil society institutions and protective safeguards, has precluded the establishment of a sustainable equilibrium between economic expansion and social equity. Dubai, acting as a global nexus for trade and tourism, has inadvertently fostered an environment where informal and illicit activities, including sex work, germinate within regulatory gaps, becoming embedded within the intricate economic fabric. This situation indicates that the governing structures, notwithstanding their success in capital aggregation, have yet to cultivate the institutional capacity required to manage the social externalities of globalization.

Consequently, ameliorating this situation mandates the enactment of comprehensive, multi-scalar policies designed to forge a congruence between economic advancement and the non-negotiable demands of social justice. Such reforms must encompass the reinforcement of legal strictures, the establishment of robust labor protection modalities, the pursuit of regional and international collaboration to combat human exploitation, and the drafting of enduring social policies. Absent these systemic adjustments,

any strategy focused solely on economic growth will inevitably encounter intractable structural impediments over the long term. Ultimately, realizing a development blueprint that successfully integrates economic gains with fundamental social and humanistic principles will not only enhance the UAE's international standing but will also cultivate a more equitable and stable society for the future.

**Key words:** Migrant Exploitation, Neoliberal Development, Economic Globalization, Structuralism, Gender Commodification.

### **Conflict of Interest**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest in conducting this research study.