



# Paradoxes of Citizenship in the Global City of Dubai

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## **Abstract:**

*This article attempts to examine the concept and practice of the citizenship the UAE and particularly in the global city of Dubai. It also provides a precise comparison between modern conception of citizenship and citizenship in Arab Gulf countries. There is a general perception that globalization promotes democracy. However, in the case of Dubai, despite being a global city, one of the richest economy and sign of material progress, giving abundant economic privileges to its citizens, but citizens of the country are denied their political and civil rights. The precarious conditions of the foreign working, denial of their basic human rights put the questions on the process of globalization. These all factors combining together construct many paradoxes and contradictions. The modernity and tradition seems going together.*

**Keywords:** *citizenship, globalization, Dubai, rights, development.*

## **1. Introduction**

It is considered that globalization is bound to lead to vanishing of the national identities with having the tendency of promoting the idea of global citizenship and global village. But the mobilization of human being is strictly limited to the needs of manpower in industrialized countries and of tourism into specific spots in the poor countries. Dubai, one of the federal units of UAE is successfully promoted itself as the global city.

Within the control of the Emir's family, city functions with the help of the services of top executive of foreign companies and civil servants. The huge masses of cheap labor mainly from South and South West Asia all together estimated to represent over 95% of the total population the city. Thus the native population known in Arabic as 'watani' (citizens) represents only a tiny minority. It is because of the cultural influences on the concept of citizenship that make it more sophisticated in nature. In gulf counties, it is generally accepted in terms of meaning of citizenship that citizens and non-citizens are separated on the basis of who has a say in the public affairs. But in the Dubai, the situation is more complex since neither the local population on one side, nor the aliens on the other, enjoys a similar and equal status and share of wealth and power. And these discrepancies play an important role, as the notion of citizenship appears more multifaceted than it looks at first sight. The paper tries to seek the cultural influences of society on the concept of citizenship and then what the complexity has occurred within the same after Dubai's emergence as global city.

## **2. The Modern Conception of Citizenship**



The citizenship as a concept generally understood as referring to the relationship between the individual and the state. The commonly accepted definition of citizenship is of the British Sociologist T.H. Marshall as who defines it as the “full and equal membership in a political community”. It denotes the two things; one, the unit of membership; the political community that in the modern context is the nation state, two, the nature of that membership; that is full and equal. In Greek city states, very few inhabitants enjoyed the status of ‘freemen’ who were treated as full citizens. In that context, citizenship was seen as the ‘privilege of the ruling class’[1] . Through the passage of time, the idea of citizenship has been changing parallel to the changes in the nature of state and sovereignty. Many revolutions and ideas of political philosophers played a crucial role in expanding the meaning of the citizenship. It is considered by the scholars that in the Arab World, the nature of state and sovereignty have been seen mostly stagnant, regulated by religious, divine and transcendental idealism. The tribalism, traditional way of ruling, despotism or dynasty has been the driving force of society and politics in the region [2].

In the Marshal’s explanation, citizenship is defined in terms of rights and includes three important components; civil, political and social rights. The evolution of this notion of citizenship observed in the case of England. In this context, the 18<sup>th</sup> century has witnessed the development of civil rights and in order to implement them the establishment of the court in England. Further, 19<sup>th</sup> century has witnessed the development of political

rights and the establishment of the British parliament to materialize it. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the development of social rights and emergence of the welfare state to materialize it. In this process, citizenship prescribed equal rights, liberties and power of individuals [3].

Theoretically, in the modern state, there is a very important distinction in the analysis of state-society relations where ‘citizen’ is separated from the ‘subject’ [4]. The citizen is a free and independent participant in the political sphere. Contrary to a citizen, a subject is not free but is tied to the hierarchy where authority is supreme. The subject is a member of the political organization, as Anderson (1991) calls it, ‘the dynastic realm’; a kinship based ruling system that gains its legitimacy directly from divinity, as opposed to the idea of the nation itself where nation-state gains its legitimacy from its population [5].

The study of citizenship as a legal practice is conceptually divided into two main types of citizenship principles; *jus sanguinis* (law of blood) and *jus soli* (law of the soil). The former refers to the citizenship of children whose parents are citizens of a given country. It is derived through ethnic or cultural origins. And the latter refers to citizenship granted to those born within the territory of the state or who have lived in it for a certain number of years (with a few common exceptions such as children of foreign diplomat) [6]. In almost of the Arab Gulf countries citizenship could be acquired through *jus sanguinis*, the ‘law of blood’ only, not through the *jus soli* as in the America and India. In order to



obtain the citizenship, very strict applications of *jus sanguinis* are in practice. Even sometimes DNA tests are done to solve conflicts regarding the naturalization [7].

### 3. Tribalism and Power Structure in the Arab Gulf Countries

The UAE's (this is almost same in all Arabian Gulf countries) rulers continues to cherish a tribally organized social formation run a 'vertical' division of power. The supreme leader (*Amir*) is entitled to his position at the top. His subordinates are below in the hierarchy. The other authorities of the state are the part of the extended family of *Amir*, have been assigned a subordinate role in the functioning of the state. The common people are at the bottom of the hierarchy in the division of power [8]. In the modern democratic framework, a citizen can aspire for the top position of governance through contesting elections but in the Gulf countries a ordinary citizen cannot even dream acquire the position of the top authority. The practice of citizenship is based on the allegiance to the ruler, not to the institutions of power. Contrary to it, modern notion of the citizenship is based on the allegiance to the state as a political community [9]. The determinants of the citizenship in Arab Gulf countries are based on the idea of kinship, family lineage, ancestral and religious community. These elements in defining citizenship are still continuing in their fabricated version even within parliamentary democracy. However, it goes against the very idea of democracy itself [10].

The family is the basis unit of the education of citizens and the structure and nature of the family determines the nature of the citizenship. The family, as the basic unit of society in the Arab Gulf countries, is depicted by scholars based on empirical observations as a patriarchal, pyramidal, and hierarchical (particularly with respect to sex and age) institution [11] (Barakat 1993). The father or male head of the family holds the position of *rabb-al-usra* (the lord of the family). At the very bottom of the traditional family pyramid, women and girls are a permanently subjected population. Unlike a boy who can grow up to be *rabb al-usra* in his own home, a girl has little scope to look forward even in her own family. The women's identity is subjected to her family's *rabb al-usra* [12].

The vertical structure of citizenship affects the pattern of material privileges. The categorization of the citizenship determines the privileges as well as marginalization [13] (Tetreault 2000: 33). In the context of Arab countries of the Gulf, Kinninmont [14] argues, "Gulf governments have continued to define different *de facto* tiers of citizenship—determining who is entitled to which levels of economic benefits on the basis of ancestry, who is entitled to vote, whether women can pass citizenship on to their children, and in some cases, even stripping citizenship from dissidents perceived as being disloyal." The individual or family (in broader sense kin group) belonging to a powerful tribe is privileged while other tribes lag behind and are deprived of material benefits. They are confined to do their duty in their domain, use their authority (as an individual) in a very limited

way, according to their position in the vertical line of power division [15].

#### **4. Dubai as a Global City**

Dubai is the most populous city and an emirate in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). It is a second largest emirate by territorial size after the capital, Abu Dhabi. Dubai has been globalizing city since long back. Dubai has never been an agrarian economy but a vibrant centre of trade throughout of the past centuries. Dubai, from its inception has been economic capital of the ruler. The city is termed as “Dubai enterprise” that denotes the economic popularity of the city within the UAE as well as globally.

Historically, the city was a famous trading centre for pearls, a smuggling gate of gold for the Indian market and various precious goods for Central Asia. Dubai turned into a regional supermarket in the Asia. It has been the manufacturing hub of imported goods by using its resources and modern infrastructure, chief energy and labour. In the beginning of the twentieth century when Shaikh Maktoum removed many trade barriers, Dubai’s strategic cross road location between Asia and Europe allowed it to become the main port of the Gulf coast, thus Dubai has become intermediate for the world trade. After the independence from British imperialism in 1971, and the accumulation of oil revenues, the royal family had envisioned a greater development project for the city. Large corporations, such as the construction company Emaar, Dubai Holdings, Emirates Airlines, are fully funded by the rulers. It is said that the Dubai

has become a corporation in itself with King Mohammad Al-Maktoum as its CEO. His determination, enthusiasm, sophisticated vision and unlimited budget have been important factor in the success of Dubai as a business spot as well as global city [16].

Its unique infrastructure and architecture, where one side attracted the great influx of Lebanese, Indian and Iranian as well as Western expatriates, other side its free port and trade zones tremendously invited foreign investors fulfilling together the requirements of industrial development. The expatriate population helped Dubai not only to grow its economy but also to share a deep appreciation for its smooth administrative functioning. The top executive of foreign companies and civil servants make the city function under control of the local Emir family [17].

The huge masses of cheap labor originating mainly from south West Asia, altogether with the foreign inhabitants are estimated to represent over 80-90 percent of the total population. The all above factor have helped and made the way for the achievement of the Maktoum family’s dream of making Dubai a global city. But in the context of democratic framework of globalization, Dubai’s legal and local structural framework has been identified as barrier for the realization of its identity as global city. The combination of tribal set up of indigenous inhabitants and the huge immigrant population with the diversity of culture resulted in a great inequality. Therefore one can conclude that Dubai as a global city represent to



the phrase ‘globalization without democracy’. The global city smoothly factions and holds the status of a global city without any kind of participation of workers and bulk of native populations, in the political process, they are denied political right and do not have any say in the decision making. The workers played a crucial role in the development of city and have a national bound. Thus the global city of Dubai has gained globalization with implying the negation or suppression of civic and political rights in favor of economic competitiveness [18].

### **5. Paradoxes of Citizenship in Dubai**

In the case of global city of Dubai the modern conception of citizenship produces paradoxes. Despite of the great industrial development and huge economic achievements, modern technological advancement, there is no progress in the socio-political rights of the citizen in particular and economic and political rights if foreign workers population in general. The large foreign laborers and expatriates are used for the purpose of economic ambitions of city’s ruling elites. However, Dubai’s native citizens are granted many privileges as the economic and social rights like the allowances which are given to every family for its housing, the schooling of its children, health benefits, opening of a business. In Dubai particular and in UAE in general the huge profits of rentier economy are distributed among the citizens in the form of welfare schemes. It becomes an excuse for ruling class practising vertical hierarchical structure of citizenship. The slogan “no taxation, no representation”, is popularly used in this context. Another famous excuse behind the denial

of citizenship rights to the huge majority of its population and any kind of citizenship to workers’ population is given in this way that ‘the increasing demographic gap between local population and foreign laborers’ is the threat to the country’s native population. The ruling class also comes with the arguments that the increasing proportion of foreign population has raised the insecurity issues. But that does not justify the denial of citizenship rights of native population who has to follow the vertical hierarchical notion of the allegiance to the authority in today when Dubai is tagged the honor of global city and UAE is one of the richest counties of the world. The denial of basic human rights of the individuals either the indigenous population or foreign workers could never be justified by any excuse given by the ruling class [19].

There is huge gap between the privileges of citizens and non-citizens in the global city of Dubai. Though the ordinary native citizens do not enjoy political rights but are given huge economic privileges through highly welfare satchems and government policies. In Dubai, ordinary foreigners do not take benefit of any of the advantages granted to the citizens. No matter whatever their origin, their time spent in city, their social or professional position, their contribution to the city. They could be expelled from the country at the any movement for no season. Dubai’s government is keen to protect the status quo and doesn’t want to compromise its cultural values or standard of living by allowing foreigners to become a permanent part of society and assimilate with. In exceptional



circumstances only Dubai's supreme ruler might grant citizenship to a foreigner who has provided outstanding service to the state over a number of years [20].

It is because of the strict application of blood relation (*jus sanguinis*) law in the practice of citizenship, children of foreigners born in Dubai don't have right of citizenship and they are automatically assumed having nationality of their parents [21]. In Dubai, the foreigners are fully submitted to the goodwill of their sponsors, who is either an individual or a local private or public institution. The State's protection granted to them is very limited, in case of a dispute with a national; the workers are not heard by legal authorities. But, contrary to Dubai, as in the case of New York and other North American cities, several layers of migrants have been naturalised, after spending certain time period in country they are given legitimacy to participate in political and social process, and enlarging their circle over time to those who followed by the same process [22].

## 6. The Voices of Resistance and Reformation

There is an evident rise of the civil society across the Arab Gulf countries particularly consisted of middle class ordinary citizens. The ordinary native citizens are being conscious about the ruling families' vested interests. They are anxious about the increasing demographic imbalance between them and immigrant population. They are concerned about their and their next generations' survival in near future. In their own country,

particularly in Dubai the native citizens are remained only 5 percentage of the entire population living the city. Though they are financially privileged but suffering from a loss of identity. Since their children and young population of native citizenry are being thought by foreigners, they are threatened by the feeling of cultural loss. The dominant social values tend to be replaced by those of the migrants in the near future. This created a kind of fear among the indigenous native population. There is an increasing demand for reformation in the economic policies and political participation. The minister for the defence of the Dubai federation once spoke; about the need to open the society in order to normalise its functioning, to ensure its sustainability. He expressed the concern to organise and regularise parliamentary elections. But these sorts of concerns are used for the public propaganda to avoid the upheaval and decrease the pace of democratization. The promise never comes to the practice.

At the some corner in social spaces there are also heated debates about priorities and actions to be taken to correct the misconduct of companies and the neglect of the State regarding abuses to the immigrant labourers. In some cases, the authorities are forced by the civil society to take action in the case of disputes between them and their employees; Dubai's police in the cases of payment of wages have shown the active response. This shows that the foreigners may have their voice heard in the changing socio-political conditions. Even though not by the will of the authorities to take into account of their plight, but due to

international human right organizations, media and increasing consciousness of the workers to fight for their basic human rights. Consequently, foreign population of Dubai is not silent and wants to have a say in public affairs [23].

## 7. Conclusion

One side where Dubai is a glamorous global city, representing the high class living standard and one of the highest per capita income in the world. The globalisation through its tenets; open trade, foreign direct investment and marketization made people economically strong and independent but failed to democratise the regime. In other words, the global flows of capital where one side highly influenced economic, technological development but failed to full fill the increasing demand of political participation and civic rights. The all processes are concentrated on the securing vested interest of the ruling regime and citizens are remained like silent spectator. The big embarrassment for native citizens of Dubai is that they have not enough capability to say in the system, but they can see the foreigner's involvement in the decisions making, however at the same time foreign workers are denied even their basis human rights. There is no hope for the naturalization of the non-native citizens since there are still prevalent traditional values and norms in the citizenship law of the country despite being a global city. This looks like a paradox or contradictory to the modern concept of citizenship that Dubai's citizens enjoy social rights in form of welfare policies or subsidies provided by state more than others in the world without attaining political, civil right and without

representation. The precarious condition of the workers shows the reality of magnificent city, that they have to live in squalid housing projects, their working conditions are inhumane. This proves that openness and neoliberal policies can make one country's outlook best and economically capable but it does not mean that this economic benefit would help in overall human development.

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