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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the motivations of qualified female self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) with minoritized and intersectional identities from the United Kingdom and United States to relocate to and remain in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Drawing on 30 in-depth interviews with women employed in the UAE’s education sector, we employ grounded theory to explore the interplay between socio-political conditions, safety, and expatriation decisions. While prior literature emphasizes career advancement and lifestyle, our findings foreground safety—personal, workplace, and child safety—as a central driver. Participants framed the UAE as a “safe haven” in contrast to deteriorating socio-political and security conditions in their home countries, including racialized and gendered violence, workplace threats such as school shootings, and systemic risks to children, particularly racialized youth. Using Honneth’s (1996) recognition theory, we conceptualize safety as a precondition for dignity, self-worth, and social recognition, extending expatriation theory to include safety as a core motivator rather than a background factor. The study also highlights the paradox of the UAE’s high physical safety alongside socio-political constraints. We contribute to migration and global mobility scholarship by reframing SIE motivations as acts of emancipation from misrecognition, with implications for policy, organizational practice, and future intersectional research.

Keywords: expatriation, safety, recognition, UAE

INTRODUCTION

There has been extensive research into expatriation and, specifically, into understanding the motivations for expatriation (Shortland, 2016). Although much of the research has centered on expatriation in organizational contexts, a significant body of work has emerged on self-initiated expatriation, which underscores the importance of individual agency and choices in shaping motivation to expatriate (Al Ariss et al., 2012; Doherty, 2013; Selmer et al., 2023). Notably, scholars assert that self-initiated expatriation diverges from assigned expatriation (Selmer et al., 2023), positing that expatriate outcomes - including the motivation to expatriate - are also distinct. A recent systematic literature review by Arifa et al. (2021) notes that the motivations for expatriation, and the desire to remain an expatriate, are more nuanced than previously acknowledged, arguing that for self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) the motivations include (1) opportunities for travel and adventure; (2) career development; (3) personal relationships and quality of life, as well as (4) larger socio-political factors such as economic conditions, the political environment, and cultural influences.

The Arifa et al. (2021) literature review identifies 21 research papers that underscore politics and culture as primary motivators for expatriation across various employment sectors, national contexts, and participant demographics. To supplement this, we aim to deepen the understanding of socio-political factors as both motivating elements for expatriation and reasons for the decision to remain expatriates. Specifically, we focus on the motivations of women SIEs with multiple minoritized and intersectional identities (Crenshaw, 1991) who are structurally disadvantaged in their home countries (here United Kingdom and United States). In doing so, we respond to the call by Brewster et al. (2021) for future research that explores the motivations of female SIEs with diverse backgrounds to ascertain whether commonalities exist in their expatriation motivations.

Our study employs grounded theory building (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), which involves insights from field-based research, developed through interviews with 30 qualified female SIEs with minoritized and intersectional identities who expatriated from either the United Kingdom (UK) or the United States of America (USA) to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and who work in the latter country's education sector. Livingston and Rosette (2020) define minoritized women as individuals who experience compounded social disadvantage due to the intersection of gender and race, leading to systemic exclusion, limited access to resources, and constrained opportunities for leadership and recognition. Our research participants are, due to their intersectional identities (Crenshaw, 1991), in particular race and gender, minoritized in their home countries. Our research participants varied in age, race, nationality, and religion allowing us to confirm the veracity of patterns that we identified through our qualitative study. This methodology was selected due to the limited existing theoretical frameworks addressing this phenomenon and enables us to generate novel insights (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). We address the research question: *What are the motivators for qualified women self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) with minoritized and intersectional identities from the USA and UK to expatriate to and remain as expatriates in the UAE?* Our contribution to the expatriation literature lies in extending the theory of expatriation by providing a unique perspective on the motivations of women expatriates. We illuminate the multifaceted reasoning behind expatriation and the decision to remain expatriates, thereby enhancing our understanding of the role of socio-political situations in both the home and host countries as influential factors for women's expatriation. We echo Arifa et al. (2021) and assert that political factors in both the home and host countries must be considered in expatriation analysis.

This study expands on the recognition theory by exploring the motivations of minoritized British and American women expatriates in the UAE, particularly regarding "safe haven" and

"meaningful location" (Muir et al., 2014, p. 244). We contribute to the expatriation literature by illustrating that perceived safety in the host country is an important pull factor and the lack of safety an important push factor for expatriation. Our research concludes by demonstrating that Western women may choose to expatriate and remain expatriates for reasons that differ from those currently acknowledged in the literature. In particular, our research illustrates that women expatriate for three types of safety: personal safety, workplace safety and safety for their children.

MOTIVATIONS TO EXPATRIATE

There is an extensive body of literature on the motivations for expatriation (Arifa et al., 2021; Brewster et al., 2021), indicating that they are multifaceted and far more nuanced than previously understood. Froese (2012) posits that the varied motivations for expatriation may be influenced by factors such as age, gender, and life stage, but it seems that motivations for expatriation can encompass a wide range of factors, including personal growth and development (Suutari et al., 2018; Doherty, 2013; Oberholster et al., 2013), career advancement (Richardson & McKenna, 2002; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010; Nolan & Morley, 2014), a desire for adventure (Suutari et al., 2018; Doherty, 2013), improved quality of life (Despotovic et al., 2022), and economic incentives (Richardson & McKenna, 2002; Despotovic et al., 2022). Additionally, some studies have suggested that the motivation can include family considerations (Muir et al., 2014), and an escape from one's home environment (Richardson & McKenna, 2002). There is no reliable evidence on the proportions of men and women as expatriates (Adler, 1987). Adler (1984) suggested it was 3% in the 1980s and consultancy surveys suggest around a third now (Santa Fe, 2020; Allianz Care, 2023) indicating that women still remain under-represented as expatriates compared to men (Haak-Saheem et al., 2022). In their systematic literature review, Hutchings (2022) and Salamin &

Hanappi (2014) aim to elucidate the underrepresentation of women in expatriate research. They explain that prior to the mid-1990s, there was a lack of interest among women in participating in international assignments, coupled with insufficient support from host countries and organizations to send women abroad, thereby creating a double bind (Adler, 1984). The expansion of international career opportunities from the mid-1990s onwards prompted greater participation of women in expatriation; however, they still faced significant institutional hurdles (Altman & Shortland, 2008).

Consequently, while research on women's expatriation have been conducted in the Gulf region, in particular the UAE (Harrison & Michailova, 2012; Tahir, 2023), Qatar (Rodriguez & Scurry, 2019; Khattab et al., 2020; Ewers & Shockley, 2018) as well as Saudi Arabia (Khalil et al., 2016) research examining women's motivations for expatriation remains limited. While there has been some research on global immobility (Glick et al., 2013) and conversations on how gender and other intersectional identities may influence global mobility (Rodriguez & Ridgway, 2018) our understanding remains limited. It is suggested that women expatriates pursue international assignments for complex and diverse reasons.

Studies indicate that women may choose expatriation to overcome career stagnation in their home country (Tharenou, 2003) or to escape from an oppressive and patriarchal cultural environment (Tharenou, 2010; Tlaiss & Al Waqfi, 2020). Additionally, research has demonstrated that age and marital status influence women's motivations for expatriation. Specifically, Wechtler (2018) found that single women might expatriate to escape their current careers, while Myers et al. (2017) revealed that older women may seek expatriation as a means of liberating themselves from mid-life challenges and pursuing personal growth. However, there is no consensus on whether expatriation is uniformly liberating for all women expatriates, as research by Muir et al.

(2014) suggests that for some women, the experience may be constraining. Furthermore, women's expatriation is associated with improved living standards and self-discovery (Shortland, 2016; Muir et al., 2014; Myers et al., 2017). Beyond career considerations, the host location itself has been identified as a motivating factor for expatriation (Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh, 2008).

Safety as driver for expatriation

Beyond lifestyle and career choices, Arifa et al. (2021) examined the rhetoric of political safety or political stability as a driving force behind expatriation. We refer to safety or safe environments as those where dangers do not disrupt daily life (Ipek & Paulus, 2021). There is a body of literature within the field of expatriation that focuses on dangerous or hostile environments such as Bader (2015) and Bader et al. (2015). Research examining how a destination's safety conditions affect people's willingness to relocate internationally remains surprisingly limited. While researchers like De Eccher and Duarte (2016) and Wagner and Westaby (2009) have demonstrated links between destination security and expatriation decisions, we still lack a deep understanding of the complex mechanisms at work. Specifically, more research is needed to explore how safety levels in different locations might strengthen or weaken other factors that influence expatriation choices. It is however important to note that safety or lack of safety does not necessarily refer to hot spots/danger zones in respect to terrorism/war but is on a spectrum and can be found in countries that might have otherwise been seen as (un)safe. Our study addresses this gap by comparing both high-security and high-risk destinations, thereby enhancing our understanding of how safety considerations shape expatriation decisions.

Arifa et al. (2021) discuss how individuals assess various options for relocation abroad and how they develop preferences for specific host countries. They assert that motivations for

expatriation may stem from the desire to find a safer political environment (Richardson & Wong, 2018; Harry et al., 2017; Alonso-Garbayo & Maben, 2009; Pinto & Araujo, 2016). The review suggests that SIEs develop preferences for particular countries by comparing political conditions between the home and host country (Pinto & Araujo, 2016; Harry et al., 2017; Mielly et al., 2017). According to Arifa et al. (2021), individuals reach this stage when they are dissatisfied with the circumstances in their home country or anticipate that expatriation could enhance their personal situation (Ewers & Shockley, 2018).

In this context, the definition of "safety" itself becomes multifaceted, encompassing not only physical security but also socio-political safety. For women SIEs in particular, the decision-making process involves navigating complex trade-offs between different types of safety. While some destinations may offer enhanced physical security, they might simultaneously present different socio-political constraints, creating a nuanced landscape for potential expatriates to navigate.

Conversely, local conditions may function as factors, encouraging, for example, women SIEs to expatriate or remain expatriates (Haak-Saheem et al., 2022). These conditions can vary significantly based on individual circumstances, personal networks, and professional status, leading to diverse experiences within the same host country. Research suggests that women expatriates' experiences often differ based on factors such as marital status, professional position, and cultural background (Muir et al., 2014). The rhetoric of a better life abroad can be identified as a push factor for expatriation, while familial and caregiving responsibilities may function as pull factors that encourage individuals to remain in their home countries. Furthermore, Muir et al. (2014) argue that the conventional perspective on motivation to expatriate is both limited and limiting, and they suggest that individual as well as contextual factors must be considered.

According to the authors, for SIEs, selecting a location for expatriation is about identifying "the best option at the time, given particular circumstances" (Muir et al., 2014, p. 241). The authors argue that SIEs seek a "meaningful location" and a "safe haven" (Muir et al., 2014, p. 244).

This may be a particular issue for minoritized women in countries such as the USA and the UK. Despite commonly held beliefs that the USA and the UK offer superior access to education, employment, safety, security, and welfare compared to the rest of the world, a closer examination of safety issues reveals a different picture. In these countries, many minoritized individuals continue to experience neo-colonial forms of violence (Yalkin & Özbilgin, 2023). This situation is particularly concerning for the safety of children. In the UK, for example, Action for Children reported that nearly one third of children in the UK are living in poverty (Action for Children, 2017) and the UK ranks in the bottom third for child well-being in categories such as home and family environment, health and safety, education and school life, and activities and life satisfaction, when compared to other rich countries (OECD, 2017). In the USA, gun violence in schools and society has been increasing, or perhaps becoming more visible to society due to information sharing via social media. Between January and August 2023, nearly 500 school shootings were reported, resulting in 523 deaths and 2087 injuries (Gun Violence Archive, 2023).

Furthermore, the UK and USA are hostile environments for their minority citizens, with increasing border restrictions (Nawyn, 2016), Brexit (O'Reilly et al., 2016), and the Windrush scandal (Wardle & Obermuller, 2019) in the UK. In addition, there has been a decline in welfare and safety provisions, accompanied by antagonism and backlash against diversity, equity and inclusion in both the UK and the USA (Ng et al., 2025), partly as a result of increasing austerity measures in government (De Benedictis & Gill, 2016), which have shifted the responsibility of safety, as well as social and economic status, from the state to the individual (Greenhalgh et al.,

2021). These changes are believed to disproportionately affect minoritized citizens, such as women (Karamessini & Rubery, 2013) and children (Ridge, 2013).

Various forms of resistance to such state violence can be observed in contemporary society. For example, following the first election of President Donald Trump, which symbolized the dominance of the colonial mindset, there was a surge in applications for New Zealand citizenship by US citizens (CBS, 2017). Additionally, some Americans renounced their citizenship (Cuison-Villazor, 2021). According to Cuison-Villazor (2021), in 2020, 6,705 Americans renounced their citizenship and moved to another country, representing a 260% increase from the previous year. To gain more agency in the socio-political structure of the USA, more Latinos were observed seeking US citizenship in order to vote against Trump (Preston, 2016). Similar trends can be seen in the UK, where after the Brexit referendum, driven by identitarian and conservative politics, there was a surge in UK citizenship applications (Fernandez-Reino & Sumption, 2023), an increase in Britons renouncing their UK citizenship (Butterly, 2023), and an increase in Britons applying for non-UK citizenship (O'Carroll, 2023). This complex interplay between safety and sociopolitical freedoms becomes particularly evident when examining the UAE context, which offers a high level of physical safety, particularly for women and expatriates, due to strict law enforcement and surveillance, but socio-political freedoms are tightly regulated, with limited space for dissent and restricted civil liberties such as the visa sponsorship system also known as the kafala system.

Omair (2010) explains that the UAE provides a secure environment devoid of violence. In the Safe Cities Index, both the Emirates of Dubai and Abu Dhabi (constituents of the UAE) demonstrate high scores in digital security, health security, infrastructure security, personal security, and environmental security (SCI, 2021). The UAE was ranked as the second safest

country to reside in, with the UK at 24 and the USA at number 43 (IEP Reports, 2023). The UAE Ministry of Interior (MOI) has implemented comprehensive legislation to ensure the safety of children within the country, aiming to protect and empower them through education, good health, and various facilities (MOI, 2023). These laws are further supported by legal frameworks and initiatives that promote safety (Grivna et al., 2012). However, this high level of physical safety exists within a complex sociopolitical framework where individual experiences, particularly those of women, can vary significantly. Research indicates that women expatriates in the UAE navigate a spectrum of freedoms that are often influenced by factors such as professional status, cultural background, and personal networks (Al-Hassan & James, 2021), nationality and race also known as ethnocracy which are ethno-national hierarchies within the institution (Vora & Koch, 2021). Systematic discrimination and exploitation based on factors such as nationality, gender, race, and religion significantly affect how individuals experience working life in the UAE (Le Renard & Vora, 2021).

Thus, while some women report experiencing greater personal safety and professional opportunities than in their home countries, others may face certain societal restrictions. This variation in experience highlights how safety can manifest differently for different individuals within the same context.

In addition, the UAE's geopolitical position, might lead to it being perceived as an unsafe environment, especially with neighboring countries experiencing high levels of terrorism. Some scholars have conducted research on the factors influencing the outcomes of expatriation in such environments (Bader & Berg, 2014; Bader & Schuster, 2015; Giorgi et al., 2016) and these studies illustrate the fear of relocation, the impact on psychological well-being, individual stress levels, and work attitudes and performance. This creates a multifaceted paradox where the UAE

simultaneously represents a haven of physical safety while existing within a complex framework of varying sociopolitical freedoms and regional security concerns. The experience of safety and freedom thus becomes highly individualized, dependent on personal circumstances, professional status, and cultural background. Consequently, the concept of safety in the UAE may be viewed as paradoxical.

RECOGNITION THEORY

In order to gain a deeper understanding of the motivators behind expatriation and their quest for safety, we turn to Honneth's (1996) theory of recognition. Honneth's concept of recognition provides an ideal foundation for a critical and emancipatory perspective on HRM and the motives for global mobility (Islam, 2012; Groutsis et al., 2019). This theory allows us to explore how minoritized women utilize expatriation as a potential strategy for emancipation from a deteriorating socio-politico-economic context. The underlying belief of recognition theory is that social life, work, and political and social participation contribute to human dignity and self-esteem (Honneth, 1996; Islam, 2012). According to this theory, individuals' ability to develop a positive sense of self is dependent on others' recognition and validation of their worth (Honneth & Margalit, 2001). Conversely, the failure to acknowledge or recognize individuals, known as misrecognition, results in a state of invisibility or social alienation (Honneth & Margalit, 2001). Misrecognition entails structural exclusion, which involves the denial of legal, social, and political rights necessary for full participation in and respect as a member of society (Honneth, 1996). Visser (2019) argues that misrecognition by various stakeholders, such as individuals, groups, or society as a whole, can inflict real psychological and social harm and cause feelings of humiliation and unworthiness (Beitz, 2001: 104).

However, misrecognition and the moral experience of disrespect are also believed to drive an individual's desire for emancipation (Groutsis et al., 2019). Thus, the perpetuation of misrecognition, discrimination, and oppression from multiple realms and stakeholders can ignite the quest for recognition and emancipation. This aligns with Honneth's (2010) belief that emancipatory liberation from deteriorating social and human rights is crucial for self-respect. From Honneth's perspective, it is normatively imperative to engage in emancipation when current socio-political or economic realities prevent individuals from feeling valued and recognized. The concept of emancipation is particularly useful in exploring the drivers of expatriation from contexts where labor market conditions, human rights, and employment protections are deteriorating. Therefore, expatriation can be perceived as a means of attaining socio-political recognition and emancipation. Consequently, while existing research on women's expatriation often emphasizes lifestyle and career choices as motivators, the inclusion of non-traditional, women expatriates may illustrate that expatriation represents an emancipation from misrecognition, disrespect, and oppression in their home countries.

METHODOLOGY

Research site - The UAE context

Our study is situated in the UAE, a country that provides a unique environment for studying expatriation due to the prevalence of an international workforce across all sectors and skill levels. Since gaining independence, the UAE has undergone rapid economic growth, leading to the outsourcing of both skilled and unskilled workers (Iskander, 2021). Among the approximately 10 million individuals residing in the UAE (United Nations, 2017), only 11% are estimated to be Emirati nationals, with the remaining population consisting of expatriates from over 200 different

nationalities (De Bel-Air, 2018). As of 2015, the largest foreign population in the UAE was South Asian, predominantly Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, Nepali, and Sri Lankan, accounting for 58% of the population. Asians from Southeast Asia and other Arabs comprised 17% of the population, while Western expatriates represented approximately 8.5% (World Population Review, 2023) - almost all of them in high-status occupations.

In the UAE, where the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) reports 5.5 million men are non-nationals and the other approximately 1.5 million non-nationals are women (MOFA, 2024). Previous research has highlighted gender-based differences and inequities in employment within the region (Al Waqfi & Al-Faki, 2015). However, in recent years, the UAE labor market has witnessed improvements in women's employment opportunities. Reforms promoting women's rights (Human Rights Watch, 2021) and the easing of visa restrictions, such as women being able to sponsor their families on their visas (UAE, 2023), have contributed to this positive change. Since 2021, non-Muslim expatriates have also been allowed to cohabit with the opposite sex. These changes enable expatriates, including women, to exercise more agency and choice in both work and personal lives (Meliou & Özbilgin, 2023). It is worth noting that qualified women in the UAE generally experience little discrimination in the workplace, especially when there is positive organizational support (Hutchings et al., 2013; Harrison & Michailova, 2012; Rodriguez & Ridgway, 2019; Isakovic & Whitman, 2019).

Despite advances in gender equality within the region, employment remains a prerequisite for migration to the UAE, and all foreign workers reside in the country on contractual agreements and under the sponsorship of Emirati citizens, institutions, or employers. Exceptional cases include talented professionals and outstanding students who can apply for the Golden Visa scheme, which allows them to stay in the UAE for up to 10 years. The notions of temporariness, precarity, and

gender inequality may discourage women from expatriating to the UAE. However, it is important to note that the UAE offers a level of safety and security that may be lacking in other countries.

Research approach

Utilizing a relational perspective (Kyriakidou & Özbilgin, 2004), which emphasizes the dynamic interplay among societal structures, organizational systems, and individual choices and opportunities, this study examines the motivations for expatriation among minoritized women in the UAE education sector. A qualitative methodology permits an explanatory focus, enabling research participants to articulate and discuss their motivations to expatriate to the UAE (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). The application of this theoretical framework allows for a comprehensive depiction of the dynamic social contexts experienced by the participants.

Sample

The recruitment of participants was conducted using a non-probability sampling technique. A call for participation was sent via various social media platforms targeted at women expatriates. In total, thirty individuals met our established criteria for participation. The criteria included women who initiated their expatriation to the UAE and were currently employed. Given that Western expatriates in the UAE are oftentimes highly- skilled and experienced (Haak-Shaehem et al., 2022), our research participants all held graduate or undergraduate degrees and were 30 years of age or above. During the interviews, data were collected regarding their personal demographics, encompassing factors such as gender, age, marital status, children, religion, race, and nationality. While we acknowledge our research participants' privilege due to their nationality and human capital that enabled them expatriation status (Tekeste et al., 2025), we also highlight that their race

and gender can be a source of marginalization both in their home and host country. In particular our sample, which consists of US and UK expatriates nationality, is a source of privilege due to the imperial relationship of Britain and the US with Gulf nations (Fechter & Walsh, 2010).

All participants were aged over 31 and possessed graduate degrees. Table 1 presents detailed information regarding the demographic backgrounds of the participants. Our research participants comprised highly educated women with extensive expertise in their respective fields. All participants were employed in the UAE and had either independently initiated their expatriation or relocated with their spouses. Although it was not the objective of this research study to investigate the motivations for expatriation among men, we acknowledge that joint decision-making may have influenced the expatriation process for our married participants. Sixteen participants were married, eight were single, five were divorced, and one was widowed. Throughout the research interviews, the participants elaborated on their spouses' professions, as well as the timing of their marriages in relation to their expatriation to the UAE. The majority of participants were married prior to their expatriation; however, none identified as trailing spouses. All participants possessed significant professional experience in their home countries prior to their expatriation to the UAE.

INSERT TABLE 1 HERE

Interview procedure

Following suggestions provided by Brewster et al. (2021) as well as Arifa et al. (2021) an interview guide was designed to explore individuals' motivation for expatriation (see Appendix 1). The interviews were conducted in English and facilitated via Zoom, with each session lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes. All interviews were administered by Author 1, who at the time of the data collection resided in the UAE. Author 1's insider-outsider positionality shaped the

data collection and interpretation process since the author has in-depth knowledge of local laws, employment relations, culture, system and structures. During the interview initially, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and assured participants of the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses, as well as their right to withdraw from the study at any time. For the purposes of this paper, all participants were assigned pseudonyms. The interviews adhered to a semi-structured format, guided by an interview framework designed to investigate participants' motivations for expatriation, their reasons for remaining in the UAE, and their plans for repatriation to their home countries, while allowing for the opportunity to follow issues that seemed important to the respondent. The interview questions were informed by the existing literature on expatriate motivation (Brewster et al., 2021). Open-ended questions were employed to facilitate the emergence of themes and preliminary analysis. The interviews sought to explore participants' motivations for relocating to the UAE, as well as their reasons for remaining there. Questions included: *Why did you relocate? What prompted the move from your home country to the UAE?* and *What are your plans for returning home?*

We acknowledge that the retrospective nature of the interviews may introduce recall bias, as participants reflect on past decisions and motivations (Miller et al., 1997).

In our analysis, consideration was given to the participants' nationalities, religious beliefs, and ethnic backgrounds. In accordance with Haak-Shaheem et al. (2022), we recognize the significant religious and ethnic diversity within nations and regard the documentation of these intersections as essential. The interviews were recorded and subsequently transcribed. Suddaby (2006) underscores the importance of achieving saturation in qualitative research. Following the completion of thirty interviews, we opted to halt the data collection process, as further interviews

yielded diminishing returns in terms of insights, and it became increasingly difficult to recruit additional participants.

Data analysis

Subsequent to the data collection, each interview was transcribed and reviewed for data quality purposes. The research employed a rigorous qualitative methodology based on 30 semi-structured interviews, which were recorded, transcribed verbatim, and reviewed for data quality purposes. We conducted interpretative analysis using both MAXQDA for systematic data organization, coding and documentation. This study employed simultaneous data collection and analysis (Strauss & Corbin, 1997) through the application of grounded theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Line-by-line coding was employed to provide detailed insights (Charmaz, 2006). Ongoing analysis and interpretation of the data were conducted to identify patterns and connections among key phenomena, employing the constant comparative method to iteratively navigate between the data and the evolving theory (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Each participant's perspective was initially interpreted individually before aggregating their views and experiences. Concepts with similar meanings were synthesized. Based on the methodology of data reduction of qualitative findings proposed by Gioia et al. (2013), the coding was conducted in three stages. Firstly, the lead author coded the transcripts using the logic of open coding, which involves "the process of breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing the data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1997, p. 61). In this open coding stage, first-order codes were derived from participants' narratives. Then, in the second stage, the lead author developed a preliminary code frame. Subsequently, the research team sought to establish relationships between categories through axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1997). This phase aimed to interpret and categorize the explored first-order codes. The

procedure resulted in multiple second-order theoretical categories. Finally, in the third stage, the theoretical categories were aggregated into theoretical dimensions. Selective coding was employed to identify broader dimensions and themes that formed the emergent theoretical structure (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Three aggregate theoretical categories reflecting the participants' evaluation of their motivation to expatriate and motivation to stay were identified, namely (i) general safety; (ii) safety at work; and (iii) safety for children, which were compared in both the home and host countries. Both the derived second-order theoretical categories and the aggregate theoretical dimensions significantly differ from the concepts and categories prevalent in expatriate research. Their relevance for SIEs will be discussed in the next section.

To ensure research credibility and analytical trustworthiness, we implemented several methodological safeguards. Throughout each stage, the entire data set was re-analyzed multiple times. Following the recommendations of Gioia et al. (2013, p. 22), regular meetings were held to "revisit the data, engage in mutual discussions, and develop understandings for arriving at consensual interpretations." Results were discussed among the authors at each step to facilitate collaborative interpretation and ensure analytical trustworthiness (Harrison & Rouse, 2015). We employed an insider-outsider approach to data triangulation (Smets et al., 2015), leveraging the first author's experience of working and living in the UAE while maintaining analytical distance through the outsider perspectives of the second authors. Multiple rounds of code and interpretation assessment were conducted to ensure inter-rater reliability, and the entire dataset was re-analyzed multiple times throughout each stage.

The analysis continued until theoretical saturation was reached, at which point no new codes or insights emerged from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). As recommended by Pratt (2009), the analytical procedure and resulting categories are presented in Table 2 to enhance

transparency. The resulting theoretical categories and aggregate dimensions notably diverge from conventional concepts in expatriate research, offering novel insights that will be discussed in subsequent sections. Our findings are substantiated by carefully selected quotations that illustrate the full spectrum of interviewee experiences and attitudes.

INSERT TABLE 2 HERE

FINDINGS

Our research participants discussed their motivation for relocating to the UAE. Consistent with previous studies (Richardson & Mallon, 2005; Harrison & Michailova, 2012; Muir et al., 2014), participants mentioned travel and adventure as reasons for expatriation. While lifestyle is a recurring theme in the expatriation literature (Myers et al., 2017), we delved deeper to understand what our research participants specifically meant by "lifestyle" beyond the employment relationship and opportunities for travel. In doing so, the research participants often compared their current situation with that of their home countries as a rationale for their motivation to expatriate, as well as a reason to remain expatriates. A key finding from this examination is the rhetoric of safety, in particular physical safety. This insight suggests that some expatriates' motivations may be more multifaceted than previously recognized. Furthermore, we explored the discourse surrounding safety and identified that participants' motivations for expatriation were influenced by notions of general safety, workplace safety, and safety for their children.

Societal safety in the UAE

By societal safety we mean the experience of feeling safe both on a general level and in specific situations in relation to gender and race. Our research participants consistently reported that the

UAE provides a safe haven, not only ensuring their personal safety but also affording a sense of safety as women and as individuals with different racial backgrounds. They underscored how the UAE offers them the opportunity to lead the lifestyle they desire, a privilege often unavailable to them in their countries of origin. An American woman said:

Like here, we have two cars. And we have the safety and the security; Alhamdulillah, so far, so good. We have good jobs, we have a social life. This is what America is supposed to be. (...) My husband always says we came to the Middle East to live the American dream. (Yasmin)

Beyond overall societal safety, our research participants elaborated on the level of safety they experience as women within UAE society. They highlighted that the sense of safety they enjoy in the UAE enables them to carry out their daily tasks without constant concern for their own well-being. This is particularly significant in light of the heightened concerns about women's safety, which have been exacerbated in many Western nations, including the USA and the UK, due to highly publicized tragic cases of rape and murder of women there.

If I were to go to the grocery store at midnight here in the UAE, I don't have to look over my shoulder and worry that somebody is going to steal or rob or take my purse, you know, not saying that it happens daily in Florida. (Freya)

In addition, given the prevailing lack of societal safety and the specific absence of safety for women in their home countries, participants who identified as black articulated how their racial identity played a significant role in their decision to expatriate. The 2021 report by the Council of Europe's Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) highlighted the escalating racism within European Council member states. This report pointed to issues such as racial profiling, the use of racial slurs, and excessive use of force against individuals and minoritized communities (ECRI, 2022). In the USA, despite the Convention to the Committee on the Elimination of Racial

Discrimination, ‘structural racism and xenophobia persist as powerful and pervasive forces in American society’ ([Human Rights Watch, 2022](#)). As one black woman said:

So the number one reason is like just safety. But there are two aspects of that safety. The first one is just the physical safety of being here, like as black people living in the US, our safety is generally under threat, often, especially with the political climate in the US and police brutality and that kind of stuff. Multiple people have been murdered for not actually committing crimes, right. And so, that physical safety also being like, as a woman, like I can walk outside, and I never have to worry twice about whether or not I'm going to return home. (Leah)

The motivation to expatriate to the UAE was also influenced by the political and economic landscape in the home country. Recent political elections and the subsequent changes in policies and laws, particularly in relation to the welfare of its citizens, were considered pivotal factors in the decision to become an expatriate:

But it's just not the US I grew up in. That's not the US that my parents came to. It's not what it once was in terms of safety, in terms of even economics, in terms of raising children. It's just not what it once was(...) The UAE is much more family-friendly. It is much more working mom-friendly. And so, until all my children were in school, we knew we couldn't live in the US. But then the plan was 2021 when our youngest is in school, we would go back. Trump happened. COVID happened. School shootings continue to happen. There's no real pull anymore. If we were to leave the Gulf, I don't think we would leave for the US. Okay. Like I could see us leaving the UAE potentially to go to someplace like Doha. Not to go to Virginia. (Yasmin)

While a lot of emphasis was given to the unsafe climate in their home countries and the safer environment in the UAE, research participants also recognized the downside of expatriation.

But it's just nice to have those options so we could go somewhere where, the weather is better, and it's still safe. Yeah, there's a good quality of life here. I mean, every place is not without its downsides, just different downsides. (Helen)

Research participants further elaborated that experiencing the level of safety in the UAE and the continuous lack of safety in their home countries, reconfirms their decision to be expatriates and remain expatriates with little desire to repatriate to their home countries.

I really like living here. The lifestyle is great. The travel is great. I don't want to go back home, you know, especially to the current environment where we're consistently having, you know, unsafe schools, unsafe public areas and unsafe religious experiences. And so, it was just like I would much rather work through it here, and be a little unhappy but be safe. For me safety is a fair amount, and this is an incredibly safe place. Like I love my family. I visit them during the summer. But as far as living full time in the US - I don't think I can do it again. It would have to take something drastic for me to move back to the US. (Mei)

Our findings expand Honneth's (1996) recognition theory by demonstrating that safety, as a fundamental condition of dignity and self-worth, is a crucial motivator for expatriation. While prior literature on expatriation has largely focused on career advancement and lifestyle (Doherty, 2013; Suutari et al., 2018), our study foregrounds the centrality of safety as an expatriation driver, particularly for minoritized women. The participants' accounts illustrate how perceived safety in the UAE provides them with recognition as valued individuals. Safety is an experience often denied to them in their home countries due to racial and gendered misrecognition (Honneth & Margalit, 2001). The UAE emerges as a "safe haven" (Muir et al., 2014), not just in physical terms but also in offering a context where women can feel socially and professionally valued. This

contrasts with prior conceptualizations of expatriation as primarily a voluntary career move and instead frames it as a necessity arising from structural inequalities in the home context.

Safety at work

In addition to the overarching societal safety concerns, our participants also voiced their apprehensions regarding workplace safety. As previously mentioned, all of our research participants are employed in the education sector in the UAE and bring with them extensive experience from their respective home countries. They articulated how their employment within the UAE's education sector provided them with a heightened sense of safety, a contrast to the perceived decline in safety in their home country contexts.

Some participants described a concerning increase in incidents of gun violence, as well as an increased presence of such violence within school settings in their home countries. This rise in violence served as a significant motivator for their decision to expatriate:

These things are happening where you (interviewer) are not going to be, you know. I mean, I'm a teacher. The schools are constantly being shot at almost on a monthly, even weekly basis. That's my job. I can't be safe at my job. (Mei)

Over the past decade, there has been a significant increase in reports of gun violence in educational settings in the United States of America. This has prompted educational institutions to conduct routine lockdown drills. These drills aim to prepare students, faculty, and staff on how to respond effectively to protect themselves from potential dangers both within and around the school premises (Schildkraut et al., 2019). Participants provided insights into their compliance behaviors while explaining the lockdown procedures they were required to adhere to, compliance that in itself often engendered safety fears in participants:

I would have to train the kindergarten students on how to do a lockdown, like if someone came with a weapon on campus, I had to show these kindergarteners how to get under their desk, and I had to close all the curtains. They have to crawl under a desk. And that was devastating. They're 5 years old. Some of them are in their first year of school. It's their first year in school, and we have to do these drills. It was mandatory for us to do one every 6 months or something, and some of the kids would cry, you know ... And yeah, you know, that's something. I mean, it's not in the forefront of my mind, but that's something that did linger as a teacher. I'm like I don't want my kids having to worry about safety while they're at school. But yeah, those are all things that you know as a mom and as a teacher, I don't want to have to deal with having to worry about safety. (Freya)

Neal and Griffin (2004, p. 16) define safety compliance as "adhering to safety regulations and procedures," which serves as a precursor to establishing a robust safety climate. Additionally, the authors introduce their readers to safety participation behaviour, characterized by "actively supporting safety within the broader organizational context". As an illustration:

...I will never forget that - My last year, when I was at my high school, we had a student who came with a gun, and we had a teacher who disarmed the gun from him. And I was like: oh, my God, like the gun could have gone off! Like there were other kids in the classroom. That was just too close for comfort. But these incidents are starting to really really increase. (Noor)

The absence of workplace safety and the obligation to enable safety for colleagues and school children through compliance and/or participation are motivators for expatriation to the UAE. Furthermore, research participants elaborated on how the level of safety afforded at work in the UAE, juxtaposed with the lack of safety and protection in their respective home countries,

prompted them to actively encourage their colleagues and peers back home to consider relocating to the UAE:

We used to try to show people what life is like outside the United States and say: 'You can do this too!'... 'Hey, friends, teachers, guess what? We can leave this country [USA] that doesn't care about us, and go anywhere else in the world and get paid the same and be safe!' (Mei)

Recognition theory (Honneth, 1996) emphasizes the importance of work as a site of social inclusion and validation. Our study extends this framework by illustrating how workplace safety—both physical and psychological—plays a fundamental role in expatriation decisions. Unlike existing research that frames expatriation through the lens of job prospects and career progression (Haak-Saheem et al., 2022), our findings show that the absence of workplace safety in participants' home countries acted as a critical push factor, while the perceived stability and security in UAE workplaces functioned as a pull factor. In line with Neal and Griffin's (2004) concept of safety compliance, participants described their previous workplaces as sites of fear and uncertainty, particularly due to rising incidents of school violence. The UAE, in contrast, was perceived as a space where professional recognition was possible without the psychological burden of safety concerns. Thus, our study contributes to expatriation research by positioning workplace security as a non-negotiable factor for mobility, rather than an incidental benefit, and extends recognition theory to explain how safety concerns inform expatriation decisions.

Safety for children

These concerns about increasing societal violence and the perceived lack of governmental protection were shared among participants, regardless of whether they had children or not, as they were apprehensive about the safety of children in their home societies in general. Our participants

expressed appreciation for the safety measures and the safety environment in the UAE and how they enable their children to enjoy a secure and protected childhood:

Yeah, the fact that they can go outside, and I don't have to worry about anyone taking them [her children], or you know anything, anyone trying to hurt them. (Freya)

Participants constantly made comparisons between the level of safety their children experienced in the UAE and that in their home countries. During these interviews, research participants often spoke highly of the safety environment for children in the UAE, drawing stark comparisons to the more extreme measures taken to ensure children's safety in their countries of origin. To provide some context, according to a report by Kids Health, approximately 2,100 children are reported missing in the USA every day (Dowshen, 2018). One participant told us:

So now, after having gotten married and having children, looking at the peace that my husband has with being here [UAE], and like when we go back home for the summer, he carries a gun. That's not comfortable. He carries it as a means to protect us. That's terrifying to me, you know, and my children not being able to play at the park without me having to be hyper vigilant, and just all the nerves for that I'm like: No, thanks! I don't want to sign back up for that. (Dounia)

Specifically, among research participants who identified as black and were raising sons, expatriation was primarily motivated by the desire to protect their black sons from societies where black children are racialized:

For sure, I mean the US (laughs) You know no place, no place is perfect, but especially raising a young black son. Hmm. And again, no place is perfect, and I know that there are predators everywhere, but the safety that is here, I just, I'm not going to experience that in the US for my kids. (Amara)

A recent report released by the [Children's Commissioner in 2023](#) revealed statistics regarding police strip searches of children in England and Wales. Between 2018 and mid-2022, a total of 2,847 strip searches were conducted, and nearly a quarter of these searches involved children aged 15 or younger. Furthermore, the report pointed out that 95% of these searches targeted boys, and 38% of the children who were stripped and searched were black. The report highlighted that black children in England and Wales were six times more likely to undergo strip searches compared to the general population.

Our research not only engaged participants who were parents but also individuals well-versed in the political landscape surrounding child safeguarding in their respective home countries. They shed light on the distressing reality of how children's safety, particularly that of black boys, is compromised and radicalized within their home countries. This situation has led participants who do not have children to recommend parents to consider leaving their home countries, provided they have the financial means to do so. As one participant stated:

Like it's an inherent knowledge that it's not going to be safe. It's not going to be the best environment. There's hardly anybody advocating for them [black boys], there's nobody like you know who has their best interests at heart, and even as, you know, people who work in education would say that there's too much bias. It's so much against them in the UK and even in the States. (Leaving and coming here) it's a no brainer, no brainer. (Tamara)

Although the research participants generally acknowledged the advantages of residing in the UAE and frequently emphasized the career-related compromises they had made to live and work there, only a small number of individuals mentioned the financial sacrifices that were also part of their experience:

Yeah, because coming from London, what we wanted was a safe environment for our family. We didn't want to raise our children in an environment that was unsafe, and so I can 100% tell you, my husband took a job that was not paying that well. We didn't care because we wanted our children to have a different experience, and we wanted them to grow up in a safe environment that was very, very high on quality. (Saba)

Research participants also recognized that while the UAE offers safety for children, they had to make certain trade-offs beyond their career and financial considerations. One interviewee referred to 'the weirdness' to highlight the social inequalities experienced by children living in the UAE:

We're here. It's safe. I don't have to worry about gun drills in my daughter's school, which is kind of like it always comes back to that for me. There's so much gun violence in American schools that I'm happy for her to grow up here, even with all the weirdness, and that being a kid here, and just like what you grow up getting used to and what you see and like, I mean, it's diverse in one way, but it's like not diverse in other ways, and just all the very problematic things about here. I prefer that over gun violence. So I'm happy to be here, I'm actually really happy to be here. (Helen)

Participants explained that they would move back to their home countries if safety conditions in the host country changed. Thus safety did not present only as a factor for expatriation but also for remaining as expatriates.

...if this country ever became unsafe, because that's my biggest reason for being here, it's such a safe country for my children compared to back home. So if this country shifts their way of doing things where I feel that it's not safe anymore, that would cause us to move back, because that's my main reason for being here. (Freya)

Our research aligns with and extends existing work on migration motivations, particularly the role of family considerations (Richardson & McKenna, 2002). However, while prior studies have focused on expatriation as a means to provide better educational or economic opportunities for children (Despotovic et al., 2022), we introduce safety as a primary determinant. Applying Honneth's (1996) theory of recognition, we argue that ensuring the safety of one's children is integral to the broader pursuit of social recognition and dignity in the process of international mobility. The findings indicate that for minoritized women, expatriation is not merely a personal career decision but an act of safeguarding future generations from structural violence (Yalkin & Özbilgin, 2023). This highlights a gap in existing expatriation literature, which has not fully addressed the intersection between parental responsibility, sociopolitical instability, and the decision to expatriate. By framing expatriation as an emancipatory act (Groutsis et al., 2020), our study provides a nuanced understanding of why safety remains a dominant process of emancipation for minoritized women and their children in mobility contexts.

DISCUSSION

Our findings contribute to the expatriation literature by expanding Honneth's (1996) recognition theory to include safety as a central dimension of socio-political recognition. While prior research has explored motivation to expatriation primarily through career mobility and lifestyle factors (Doherty, 2013; Suutari et al., 2018), our study illustrates that for minoritized women, safety is not just a contextual factor but a fundamental condition for self-worth and dignity. This conceptual expansion highlights how expatriation functions as an emancipatory act (Groutsis et al., 2020; Ozgoren et al., 2024), where the pursuit of physical and psychological safety is intertwined with the search for recognition and belonging. By foregrounding the role of safety in expatriation

decisions, we demonstrate that socio-political conditions in both home and host countries shape expatriation motivations in ways previously underexplored. In doing so, our study broadens the theoretical scope of expatriation research, underscoring the importance of structural inequalities and personal safety in shaping global mobility patterns.

The core finding is that perceived deteriorating socio-political conditions in multiple domains (namely, work and society) within the home country push participants to believe that safety and recognition may be found elsewhere. The existing literature on expatriation predominantly treats it as a conscious choice aimed at enhancing career prospects or lifestyle. We expand these theoretical foundations by positing that safety constitutes a significant motivation for expatriation that transcends mere career enhancement for minoritized women. For this demographic, expatriation serves as an emancipation (Ozgoren et al., 2024) from the dual constraints of gender and race based discrimination and exclusion experienced in their home countries. Participants articulated their decision to expatriate to the UAE as being driven by a desire for emancipation for their personal and professional selves and those of their children in pursuit of personal safety, professional safety, and safety for their children.

This finding reshapes our understanding of the motives behind expatriation, shifting the focus from career and lifestyle enhancement to a broader consideration of lived experience and socio-political expectations. This theme is not novel within migration literature, where individuals often opt to migrate in search of enhanced economic opportunities or as a means of escaping economic oppression and the erosion of human rights (Fouskas et al., 2021; Groutsis et al., 2020). In examining the factors influencing expatriation to the UAE, the research participants constructed a rhetoric of safety that portrayed the UAE as a 'safe haven' (Muir et al., 2014) for themselves and their families, despite living in a more authoritarian context. In this context, both the safety and

recognition associated with expatriation and the perceived lack of safety and misrecognition in remaining in their home countries were evaluated to justify their rationale for relocating to the UAE. On the one hand, the participants depicted the UAE as a safe environment conducive to the well-being of themselves and their children. On the other hand, they acknowledged that while the UAE is not the ideal or only destination for expatriation, it currently represents the best option available. Employing the theory of recognition, it becomes clear that while participants feel that leaving their home countries in pursuit of greater safety provides a level of socio-political recognition, they also recognize that this recognition entails certain sacrifices. Participants were upfront in highlighting that expatriation to the UAE brought them safety but is also coupled with negative emotions such as unhappiness and financial sacrifices. Similar to Cerdin et al. (2014) participants presented a gain framing for expatriation (safety) and a loss framing (unhappiness and financial sacrifice) for expatriation. Yet, the safety presented in the UAE, coupled with the ongoing socio-political developments in their home countries, motivates the research participants not only to expatriate but also to remain expatriates in the UAE. Those participants who have resided in the UAE for an extended period expressed a strong aversion to repatriating to their home countries: Should they be required to leave the UAE, they indicated a preference for relocating to another neighboring country rather than returning home.

This perspective aligns with the arguments presented by Muir et al. (2014) and Dickmann & Mills (2010), who assert that city-specific factors significantly impact individuals' decisions to relocate. The participants articulated a shared view of safety in the UAE as a compelling "pull factor," while the prevailing socio-political climate in the US and the UK functioned as a contributing "push factor." These findings resonate with those articulated by social scientists such as Groutsis et al. (2020), who argue that deteriorating socio-economic conditions in individuals'

home countries serve as motivators for migration. Similarly, anthropologists contend that individuals often migrate to distance themselves from identity politics or societal expectations that hinder their freedom concerning lived, conceived, and perceived spaces (Mahdavi, 2020).

In analyzing the factors influencing expatriation, our research participants consistently engaged in a comparative assessment of their home countries and the host country. Throughout the study, participants referenced recent events such as school shootings in the USA, stop-and-search practices involving children in the UK, and instances of abduction affecting both children and women. Participants utilized these events as justifications for their motivations to expatriate to the UAE. Notably, comparisons regarding the minoritization of women in the Gulf region were absent from these discussions. Instead, our participants focused on portraying their home countries as politically, economically, and morally deficient, juxtaposed with an idealized image of the host country.

Andresen et al. (2015) argue that prior to the formation of expatriation motivations, individuals undergo a process wherein expatriation expectations are established, alternatives are evaluated, and preferences are formulated. By concentrating solely on safety in the host country and the unsafe environments in their home countries, one could argue that the decision-making process of our participants is distorted, potentially omitting other essential variables required to classify safety and recognition as a pull factor and deteriorating socio-political developments in their home countries and misrecognition as a push factor. This scenario prompts careful calculations and trade-offs that contribute to the narrative that the UAE represents the optimal destination for expatriation, while overlooking the paradoxes concerning the safety of women as well as the geopolitical context of the UAE.

CONCLUSION

We contribute to the literature on expatriation by shifting the focus from career and lifestyle-driven motivations to the critical role of safety in shaping global mobility decisions. Using Honneth's (1996) recognition theory, we argue that for minoritized women, expatriation is not merely a career choice but an act of emancipation (Ozgoren et al., 2024) for themselves and their families from misrecognition and socio-political precarity in their home countries. Our findings demonstrate that safety functions as a fundamental precondition for social recognition, encompassing personal, professional, and child security. This extends prior conceptualizations of expatriation as a voluntary, self-enhancing decision and instead positions it as an imperative for individuals navigating intersecting forms of minoritization (Livingston & Rosette, 2020).

By highlighting the rhetoric of safety as both a push and pull factor, our study redefines traditional expatriation paradigms. The existing literature largely treats safety as a background condition (De Eccher & Duarte, 2016; Wagner & Westaby, 2009), whereas our research foregrounds it as a central motivator. Participants framed their expatriation as a means to secure personal safety from racialized and gendered violence, workplace safety in environments free from existential threats such as gun violence, and child safety from systemic inequalities that disproportionately impact racialized youth. This perspective expands Honneth's (1996) recognition framework, illustrating that safety is not only a material condition but also a mechanism for achieving dignity, self-worth, and social belonging through international mobility.

Additionally, our findings illuminate the paradox of safety in expatriation. While the UAE offers a heightened sense of physical safety, it also imposes socio-political constraints that challenge conventional understandings of freedom and autonomy. This contradiction complicates dominant narratives of the UAE as a "safe haven," revealing a complex interplay between

structural security and personal agency. Our research contributes to the growing literature on migration as a form of resistance (Groutsis et al., 2020; Özbilgin et al., 2025), positioning women's self-initiated expatriation as a response to neoliberal retrenchment, declining welfare states, and rising social hostility in the UK and the US.

In Table 3 below we outline how our findings extend the recognition theory in expatriation research:

INSERT TABLE 3 HERE

IMPLICATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, LIMITATIONS

This research contributes empirically by demonstrating that socio-political factors, particularly the rhetoric of safety, serve as significant factors to expatriate to the UAE.

While our study adds to the expatriation literature, it also presents limitations that suggest avenues for further research. In this study, participants identified safety as a key pull factor for expatriation. Future research could explore how safety as a motivator for expatriation evolves over time, particularly through longitudinal studies capturing shifts in socio-political climates and personal circumstances. These longitudinal studies combined with a wider sample could enable scholars to further highlight contradictions in expatriate narratives as well as enable intersectional comparison.

Future research ought to also look at this phenomenon from a multidisciplinary historical and anthropological perspective. Leaning on research conducted by Natasha Iskander (Iskander, 2021), and Neha Vora (Vora, 2019), future studies could outline how Gulf labour migration and structures influence skilled women lived experiences and employment from a historical perspective.

We acknowledge that our research participants are minoritized in their home countries yet privileged in the host country context due to their nationality which signals symbolic whiteness. Future research ought to include a wider variety of expatriates both from Global North and Global South to evaluate whether similar findings can be observed from participants from the Global South who might be minoritized in both the home and host country. This would not only allow for intersectional comparison but also built on Fraser's (2000) work on "recognition of difference".

Lack of additional qualitative data (e.g., observations or document analysis), limits the methodological comprehensiveness of the study. Another limitation pertains to the composition of the research sample, as most of the experiences reported are primarily from American expatriates. Including the experiences of expatriates from the MENA region, Africa, or Asia could enhance our understanding of the rhetoric of safety among the women self-initiated expatriate population across diverse ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds.

Additionally, the paradoxical nature of the UAE's sociopolitical context—offering safety while maintaining societal restrictions on minoritized groups—presents a compelling area for future research that warrants deeper investigation. Future studies could explore how expatriates navigate these contradictions and their impact on long-term expatriation decisions.

Furthermore, our findings invite comparative research across Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries to examine how safety perceptions and minoritized expatriate experiences vary across the region. Such research could investigate whether the safety-driven expatriation patterns identified in the UAE context are applicable to other GCC countries, potentially revealing important regional variations and commonalities in expatriate experiences.

PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS FOR HOME CONTEXT

The findings of this study have important practical implications for organizations seeking to support minoritized women educators. Organizations should develop comprehensive support systems that specifically address safety concerns at multiple levels. At the recruitment stage, companies should highlight their commitment to physical and psychological safety through clear policies and protocols. This could include implementing robust security measures, establishing confidential reporting systems for safety concerns, and providing safety-related training and resources. Organizations should also create dedicated mentorship programs pairing new minoritized women with experienced ones who can provide guidance on navigating safety challenges in both work and social contexts. HR departments should establish regular check-ins focused specifically on safety and wellbeing, going beyond traditional performance reviews to address the unique challenges faced by minoritized women. Additionally, organizations can create employee resource groups focused on safety and inclusion, providing a space for minoritized women to share experiences and coping strategies. Companies should also consider providing additional security benefits such as safe transportation options and flexible working arrangements to avoid unsafe commuting times. These practical measures can help organizations better support minoritized women while fostering a more inclusive workplace environment that acknowledges and addresses their safety concerns.

LIMITATIONS

Several limitations of this study present opportunities for future research. First, our reliance on self-reported data from expatriates themselves may introduce potential bias and limit the comprehensiveness of our findings. Future research could benefit from triangulating data by incorporating perspectives from multiple stakeholders, including spouses, family members,

colleagues, and HR managers, to provide a more complete picture of safety-related expatriation motivations. Second, while our study focused on the UAE context, future research could explore how safety motivations manifest in other geographical contexts, particularly in regions with different safety profiles and cultural norms. Additionally, longitudinal studies could examine how safety perceptions and experiences evolve over time throughout the expatriation journey. Third, our sample primarily consisted of American and British expatriates; future research should include more diverse nationalities to understand how safety concerns vary across different cultural and racial backgrounds. Finally, comparative studies examining safety motivations across different industries beyond education could provide valuable insights into sector-specific challenges and support needs.

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Appendix 1: Interview Questions

General Information:

Tell me more about yourself? When did you relocate to the UAE? How long have you been here? Was it self-initiated, part of a spousal move or international assignment? How did the process evolve?

Initial Motivations and Decision-Making

Could you tell me about your initial motivations for moving abroad on your own?

What factors influenced your decision to become a self-initiated expatriate?

Did you have any personal, professional, or social goals in mind?

What was the primary motivator for relocation?

What was the hope/vision of this relocation?

How did your home-country context shape your decision to move abroad?

Were there any specific push or pull factors (e.g., economic conditions, career opportunities, personal situations)?

Did your identity (e.g., gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation) play a role in your decision to relocate?

In what ways did these aspects of your identity influence your choices?

Which reactions did you receive from your environment (colleagues, friends, family etc)?

Evolution of Motivation Over Time

Have your motivations for living abroad changed since you first arrived? If so, what factors led to these changes?

How do current motivations compare to your initial reasons for expatriation?

Do you see your current motivation to remain an SIE as similar to or different from your original motivation?

Are there new personal or professional goals that keep you abroad?

Have you ever considered returning to your home country? Why or why not?

In what ways do you anticipate your motivations may evolve in the future?

Do you think these changes might be influenced by personal or external factors?

Would you consider to move back? What are your aspirations for staying in the UAE?

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Closure

Do you have any remaining questions?

Thanks for participating in the study.

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Table 1: Participant demographic

| Pseudonym | Age Group | Religion | Emirate of Residence | Education | Position | Years in UAE | No. of Children | Marital Status | Race |
|------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------------------|-------------------|-----------------|---------------------|------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| Aisha | 51-60 | Muslim | Abu Dhabi | Master's degree | Teacher | 8 | 2 | Married | Black American |
| Sofia | 51-60 | Christian | Abu Dhabi | Master's degree | Trainer | 24 | 1 | Married | White American |
| Yara | 41-50 | Muslim | Abu Dhabi | Master's degree | Trainer | 15 | 2 | Divorced | Black American |
| Amara | 41-50 | Christian | Abu Dhabi | Master's degree | Student Affairs | 2 | 2 | Married | Black American |
| Mei | 31-40 | N/A | Dubai | Master's degree | Teacher | 4 | 0 | Single | Black American |
| Nia | 51-60 | Muslim | Dubai | Master's degree | Trainer | 30 | 2 | Married | Asian British |
| Sara | 51-60 | Spiritual | Abu Dhabi | Bachelor's degree | Trainer | 5 | 2 | Married | Black American |
| Amani | 31-40 | Christian | Abu Dhabi | Ph.D. | Teacher | 3 | 0 | Married | Black American |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--------|-------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|-----------------|------------------|---|----------|----------------|
| Lynn | 31-40 | Christian | Dubai | Bachelor's degree | Teacher | 7 | 1 | Married | Black British |
| Freya | 31-40 | N/A | Dubai | Bachelor's degree | Teacher | 5 | 3 | Married | Black American |
| Noor | 41-50 | Spiritual | Dubai | Bachelor's degree | Student Affairs | Less than a year | 0 | Divorced | Black American |
| Imani | 51-60 | Muslim | Al Ain | Master's degree | Teacher | 8 | 1 | Divorced | Asian British |
| Amina | 51-60 | Muslim | Abu Dhabi | Master's degree | Trainer | 11 | 4 | Married | Black American |
| Dalia | 31-40 | Spiritual | Dubai | Bachelor's degree | Trainer | 1 | 0 | Single | Black British |
| Tamara | 31-40 | N/A | Dubai | Bachelor's degree | Trainer | 1 | 0 | Single | Black American |
| Saba | 41-50 | Spiritual | Abu Dhabi | Bachelor's degree | Trainer | 23 | 3 | Divorced | Black British |
| Maya | 41-50 | N/A | Abu Dhabi | Bachelor's degree | Teacher | 4 | 4 | Divorced | Black British |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------|-------|-----------|----------------|-------------------|-----------------|----|---|---------|----------------|
| Yasmin | 41-50 | Muslim | Abu Dhabi | Master's degree | Student Affairs | 13 | 3 | Married | Arab American |
| Amara | 31-40 | Spiritual | Ras Al Khaimah | Ph.D. | Researcher | 6 | 0 | Single | Black American |
| Helen | 41-50 | N/A | Abu Dhabi | Bachelor's degree | Trainer | 5 | 1 | Married | White American |
| Christina | 31-40 | N/A | Abu Dhabi | Master's degree | Student Affairs | 10 | 0 | Married | White American |
| Salina | 41-50 | N/A | Abu Dhabi | Bachelor's degree | Teacher | 5 | 0 | Single | Black American |
| Leah | 31-40 | Christian | Abu Dhabi | Master's degree | Student Affairs | 5 | 1 | Married | Black American |
| Bella | 31-40 | Christian | Sharjah | Master's degree | Student Affairs | 2 | 0 | Single | Black American |
| Julia | 41-50 | N/A | Dubai | Ph.D. | Teacher | 12 | 2 | Widowed | Black American |
| Dounia | 41-50 | Muslim | Abu Dhabi | Master's degree | Teacher | 14 | 2 | Married | Black American |

| | | | | | | | | | |
|--------|-------|-----------|-----------|-----------------|------------|----|---|---------|----------------|
| Angela | 31-40 | Christian | Abu Dhabi | Master's degree | Researcher | 1 | 0 | Single | White British |
| Ada | 31-40 | Christian | Abu Dhabi | Ph.D. | Researcher | 6 | 1 | Married | White American |
| Susan | 31-40 | Christian | Abu Dhabi | Master's degree | Researcher | 1 | 2 | Married | Arab American |
| Marwa | 31-40 | Muslim | Abu Dhabi | Master's degree | Researcher | 15 | 0 | Single | Arab American |

| Table 2: Data Structure | | | |
|--|----------------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| First order codes | Second order themes | Aggregated dimension | Indicative quotes |
| Feeling of safety in public spheres | Safety in general | General Safety in the UAE – | I like that the safety in the country is just fantastic. (Christina) |
| Feeling of safety as women in environments deemed as unsafe in-home country Comparison to UAE | Safety as women | | And I can get in a taxi in the middle of the night, and feel safe. So like just being able to move around as a single woman in a way that felt really safe (Yasmin) |
| Feeling of safety as gendered and racialized individual | Safety as black women | | There are still racial issues and dynamics, though people pretend they're not like they're still but they're not an active threat to our safety the way they are in the US. (Leah) |
| Political climate promoting hostile environment Radicalisation of society in UK and USA | Political and economic landscape | | Actually, I got accepted. So doctoral programs were either starting that or moving abroad. But like after Trump after black lives matter like, you know, just being really politically I guess, involved at, you know, to a lower scale, or just like being emotionally drained from having that racialized identity I was like, I need to get out. (Bella) |
| | | | |

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|--|-------------------------|------------------|---|
| Unsafe political and social conditions | Remain Expats | | You know, if you're an expatriate and you want to go home you want get on this flight, because it's the last one before we shut down [COVID Lockdown], you know all of this, and then also it was a time when George Floyd, the public murder, for it had happened in Minneapolis, which is where my university was, you know, I don't want to go home (Amara) |
| Frequent threats to safety in work environment | Safety at work | Safety at work - | And you know schools in America were become very dangerous. The last year I worked in a high school we had about 5 or 6 incidents with students bringing guns to school. And so I was hearing that UAE, specifically Dubai was a very safe place to be, and it sounded like I have nothing to lose. (Noor) |
| Expectancy to follow safety measures in unsafe environments | Compliance behaviour | | I would have to train the kindergarten students on how to do a lockdown like if someone came with a weapon on campus, I had to show these kindergarteners how to get on their desk, and I had to close all the curtains. They have to go crawl under a desk. and it's, that was devastating. (Freya) |
| Voluntary behaviour to facilitate safe environment at work | Participating behaviour | | Absolutely, and I will never forget that my last year, when I was at my high school, we had a student that came with a gun, and we had a teacher that disarmed the gun from him. And I was like, oh, my God, like the gun could have went off like there were other kids in the classroom like that was just too close for comfort. So yeah. But incidents are starting to really really increase. (Noor) |
| Unsafe home environment and safe host environment encouraging expatriation | Remain Expats | | We used to try to show people what life is like outside the United States and say: 'You can do this, too, hey, friends, good teachers. Guess what we can leave this country that doesn't care about us, and go anywhere else in the world and get paid the same and be safe.' (Mei) |

| | | | |
|---|---|-----------------------|---|
| Social and education sphere deemed as unsafe | Children in general | Safety for children - | Yes. It was like my daughter was, you know, getting older. And I was gonna send her to the US to nursery. It was when Sandy Hook happened in the United States, and they killed those 26 kids at an elementary school and I was like: 'what? I'll find another contract!' It happened in December and January and we wanted to go back [to the US]. And I was like: 'Yeah. Nobody is going back'. I'm never worried about anybody killing me here [UAE], like, you know, coming to the school and killing the kids? (Julia) |
| Racial identities influence threatening of safety in home context | Black children | | And we also have a son who's going to turn one. Raising a black boy right? Like, what does that mean? And wanting him to be safe as possible, but also to have like, a future that is right, you know, so I think, yeah, this is the place to do that. (Leah) |
| Downward career mobility to enable safety for children Expatriation seen as a means to safe environment for children | Sacrifices made to gain children's safety | | Yeah, because coming from London, what we wanted was a safe environment for our family. We didn't want to raise our children in an environment that was unsafe, and so I can 100% tell you we took my husband to a job that was not paying that well. We made that decision. We didn't care because we wanted our children to have a different experience, and we wanted them to grow up in a safe environment that was very, very high on quality. (Saba) |
| Safety as pivotal motivator for expatriation and repatriation | Repatriation if safety of children is threatened. | | ...if this country ever became unsafe, because that's my biggest reason for being here is that it's such a safe country for my children compared to back home. So if this country shifts their way of doing things where I feel that it's not safe anymore, that would also cause us to move back, because that's my main reason for being here. (Freya) |

Table 3: Expansion to expatriate research with recognition theory

| Dimension of Recognition Theory | Application in Original Recognition Theory (Honneth, 1996) | Extension to Expatriate Research |
|---------------------------------|--|--|
| Love and Emotional Recognition | Fundamental for self-worth; typically provided by close relationships, such as family and partners. | Expatriation as an act of seeking safety and emotional well-being, especially for minoritized women escaping racialized and gendered violence. |
| Legal Recognition and Rights | Recognition through legal rights, protection, and inclusion in civic life. | Expatriation as a means of accessing enhanced legal protections and personal security, which may be lacking in home countries. |
| Social Recognition and Respect | Respect and status granted by society, enabling individuals to participate in meaningful work and social life. | Recognition through expatriation as a path to professional and societal respect, particularly for those facing misrecognition in their home countries. |