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Chapter 2

Long-term Residency Rights, Citizenship Schemes and the Attraction of Talents: Transnational Presence over Generations in the Face of Investment Migration

Claire Beaugrand

Abstract For decades the Arab Gulf states have been known for their massive inflows of migrants—leading to a so-called ‘demographic imbalance’, the legal and institutional temporariness of the migrants’ presence and the nearly impossible routes to naturalisation. Yet, against the background of the rootedness of second- and third-generation migrants and the pressure exerted on the Gulf economies by the need for diversification, new schemes have emerged to attract certain types of migrants and have them settle in the long run. These schemes range from the granting of freehold property and long-term residency rights to special access to citizenship based on investments or careers and positions. They all present the shared specificity of targeting the highly skilled and wealthy expatriate population. Based on an exhaustive review of the evolving legislation in each of the six states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), this chapter analyses these various schemes and their underlying rationale of diversifying the competitive advantage that cheap but temporary labour represents. It also discusses their link to and conditionality upon a previous legal permanent residence, and how these new schemes are offered as a way to solve the long-posed but vexed question of a more systemic naturalisation of generations-long residents in the countries by only handpicking those recognised as ‘valuable’ to the host country. Ultimately, the analysis concludes that this trend, to be found outside the Gulf as well, reflects worldwide competition between countries with selective migratory schemes and citizenship by investment schemes to attract the individuals richly endowed with economic, financial and cultural capital—no matter their

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rootedness in the country—rather than regulating the presence of long-term migrants without such sought-after capital.

Keywords Arab Gulf states • Long-term residency • Citizenship • Investment migration • Non-integration • Generations-long residents.

2.1 Introduction

In 2010, in an article titled ‘Non-integration policies in the Gulf monarchies: The reasons behind their longevity’, I sought to explain why the policies of the member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)—Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—which deliberately refused to integrate migrant populations were bound to last (Beaugrand 2010). This would be the case, I argued, despite the fact that the policies contradicted the conclusions of research at the time on temporary migration schemes that predicted the opposite, based on an analysis of the European precedent of post-war guestworker (*Gastarbeiter*) programmes (Castles 1986, 2006).

Net importers of labour since the take-off of their oil-based development, the Gulf states had indeed opted for official migration policies that aimed at preventing the great numbers of foreigners from settling permanently and growing roots in their places of abode. This option served reasons linked to the consolidation of their political regimes and the national citizenry's cohesiveness, and took shape primarily with the collapse of world oil prices and ensuing economic downturn in the region at the end of the 1980s, with the replacement of Arab labourers with workers from South and Southeast Asia (Birks et al. 1988).

Preventing the integration of migrants sought after in other historical migration states was achieved through two legal and institutional mechanisms organising the temporariness of the migrants' presence: the legal limitation put on the duration of fixed-term contracts and on the subsequent residency rights, on the one hand, conjugated with the nearly impossible and opaque routes to naturalisation, on the

other (Ahmad 2017: 37–66).¹ According to the official discourse, only nationals were meant to stay and grow in number and skills, in order to eventually replace foreign workers. This temporariness, going hand in hand with unequal and thus restricted rights, seemed to be in tune with the liberal principles underpinning the grand narrative of globalisation in the 1990s and its associated trend towards increased ‘flexibility and mobility’ of both capital and labour. This was true at both ends of the socioeconomic spectrum of migration.

On the one hand, the fixed-term contracts for so-called ‘unskilled’ or ‘lower-skilled’ occupations followed a purely economic logic of getting the cheapest available labour on the world market.² As some Asian labourers became more expensive,³ the Gulf turned to other countries and regions to recruit migrants, such as Nepal, East Africa and more and more West Africa. Economists from the international financial institutions contended that the low level of skills associated with low salaries compensated for by the ‘number effect’ led to low productivity in the least-valued occupations—domestic work, construction, services—and contributed, as a result, to the rapid renewal of the workforce in the constant hope of obtaining better performance.⁴ Natasha Iskander (2021: 216–255) has shown that the practice of high turnover is still common today. In the case of the construction sector in Qatar, for example, she has unpacked the role of firms’ recruitment policies in targeting low-salary labourers affected by climate change who would develop incredible technical skills only to be returned later to their home countries in order to avoid them demanding salary rises. At the time, the logic of the temporary labour rotation system was not limited to the Gulf but had also expanded elsewhere. After a 30-year suspension, temporary labour programmes were back on the agenda with the implementation of ‘voluntary return programmes’ for legal immigrants in Japan and some European countries like Spain. The aim was, according to Stephen Castles

¹ Both employment and residency rights are tied together through the sponsorship system known as *kafala*. Attiya Ahmad’s (2017: 37–66) chapter, ‘Temporariness’, gives an excellent analytical synthesis of the double mechanism.

² We use ‘so-called’ to acknowledge the work of Natasha Iskander (2021: 1–28) questioning the construction of the categories skilled/unskilled.

³ See, for instance, the case of the Filipina female domestic workers sought after as English-speaking nannies (Nagy 1998: 90).

⁴ According to Uri Dadush and Lauren Falcao (2009 : 5): ‘This gap in services productivity results in part from an overreliance on a relatively cheap and abundant stock of unskilled expatriate labor, on which the Gulf countries depend much more than other rich countries, due to their large resource endowment relative to their supply of native labor. Adopting a more efficient ratio of unskilled labor to other inputs in the service sectors that currently employ a high proportion of unskilled workers—for example, construction—would decrease reliance on imported unskilled labor’.

(2006: 748), 'to replace exploitative guestworker programs with mutually beneficial systems of voluntary circular migration'.

On the other hand, the Gulf states attempted to become key ports of call in the movements of transnational elites stemming from the West, but not only from there. In particular, Dubai started to clearly stand out by casting itself as a champion of globalisation, with its mixed population and strategic geographic location, and upheld the old '*laissez-faire, laissez-passer*' motto (Marchal et al. 2001), betting on the increasing mobility of qualified labour and the internationalisation of careers among economic elites (Wagner 2007). Martin Hvidt (2014) shows that, across the states of the GCC, the adoption of a knowledge-driven economy, conceived as the alternative to the oil-based economic model, gradually affected the way the presence of upper-class foreigners has been valued and sought after. Selected types of highly qualified foreigners, with Western educational and professional backgrounds, were identified as key assets to create an innovative environment and instil a performance-oriented culture.⁵ Hvidt, whose aim is to explain the Gulf states' deliberate choice of building iconic projects organised in clusters, sheds light on how the construction of special districts offering a high-quality life, perceived as secure and family-friendly compounded with the advantages of a tax-free environment, was essential to putting these types of elites in motion and making them leave their comfortable home countries to settle in the Gulf, if only temporarily. Iconic real estate projects in the Gulf also courted celebrities and wealthy individuals as an enticement for others and to attract money and investments, like the Palm Jumeirah in Dubai.

While mobility and temporariness seemed to apply to all foreign workers, and the presence of migrants staying for decades through the constant renewal of their fixed-term contracts remained largely invisible, the longevity of the *non-integration* model nevertheless ended up coming under stress since I first analysed it in 2010.⁶ Yet the pressure for change did not come from where it was expected. As opposed to the European precedents, where researchers observed that long settlement eventually led to the granting of rights and integration of temporary migrants, in the Gulf the strict non-integration model came to be amended predominantly to accommodate the needs

⁵ See Amélie Le Renard (2021: 25–47) for a postcolonial approach of the construction of skills as 'Western'.

⁶ The academic literature would seize on this object of study by the mid-2010s, with a focus on new generations born and raised in the Gulf (Shah 2013; Babar 2017; Assaf 2017; El Berni 2018).

of the few upper-scale migrants who felt uneasy about their precarious status, as this chapter shows.

Castles (2006: 746) recognises 'that TMWPs [temporary migrant worker programmes] can succeed in less democratic states, which deny rights to foreign workers, restrict access to the legal system, and make draconian use of deportation', even though he also expressed some doubts about '[w]hether these [Gulf] countries can prevent settlement in the long run ... since there do appear to be trends toward labor market dependency on migrants and increased family reunion in some Asian countries' (ibid.: 746n3). Both intuitions proved to be correct: the Gulf states could not prevent the settlement of migrants across generations, whose bearings are transnational. Gulf scholarship has clearly shown that the temporariness of Gulf migrants was indeed permanent (Lori 2019: 133–159). It came to devote more and more academic attention to the second and third generation of migrants (Shah 2013; Babar 2017; El Berni 2018) and to state strategies to include them symbolically while keeping them in a situation of legal inequality (Vora and Koch 2015). As per Castles's second intuition, the Gulf states have also managed to keep their broad objective of the legal non-integration of migrants by untying the question of long-run settlement from that of rights' acquisition and formal inclusion in the citizenry, that is naturalisation. The seemingly rational link between the two is set by the narrative of immigration built by states claiming diverse integrationist models. The logical argument—according to which the gradual granting of rights to migrants, particularly the less skilled who represent the majority of migrants to the Gulf,⁷ would blunt the competitiveness of their low wages and thus render the model of temporary migration doomed to failure—has not materialised (Castles 1986). On the contrary, the competitive advantage that cheap but temporary labour represents has not been exhausted until now. Part of the reason why labour has remained cheap lies in the recruitment strategies of firms that operate globally (Iskander 2021: 216–255).

However, the pressure to grant secure rights came from upper-class individuals and economic elites that the Gulf states tried to woo by satisfying their desire for permanence. This is to be contextualised in trends that see residency and mobility rights granted to privileged people, endowed with economic and sometimes cultural

⁷ As identified by Castles (2006) in the strike of Dubai construction workers in 2006 and seen more recently in the international pressure put on Doha to improve the working conditions of the construction workers building World Cup 2022 stadiums.

capital, as well as strategies developed by consulting firms to advise so-called high-net-worth individuals on how to obtain rights in several place of abode or investment by obtaining multiple legal statuses or citizenships. As Kristin Surak (2021: 286) puts it, 'as a residence-planning tool, citizenship is the right to more rights'. The academic literature has indeed spotted these new types of logic at work, in the making in the 1990s and formalised since the mid-2000s,⁸ focusing in particular on the multiplication of citizenship by investment schemes (Abrahamian 2015; Shachar 2017; Surak 2023). Paradoxically, the Gulf states bend their rules of non-integration in order to remain attractive to the narrow end of the socio-economic spectrum of migrants, and not as a result of granting more rights that would lead to the gradual integration of undifferentiated foreigners into their citizenry.

The remainder of the chapter historicises and documents the new schemes of long-term residency rights and citizenship that have flourished in almost all the GCC states to attract and retain a highly skilled and wealthy expatriate population. Distinguishing between their requirements and in particular whether a condition in terms of the duration of legal residence exists or not, the discussion raises the question of whether these new legal permanent residences affect the existing framework of temporariness or, in other words, if they will affect the integration prospects of the (highly skilled) second- and third-generation migrants in the Gulf. How are these schemes articulated with existing legislation? Are they thought of as distinct from or in conjunction with the long-posed but vexed question of a more systemic naturalisation of generations-long residents in the countries? Trying to display nuances across countries, the chapter concludes that developments in the Gulf reflect broader migration trends that function on a classist basis and the worldwide competition between countries. This is driven by a logic to attract individuals richly endowed with economic, financial and cultural capital—no matter their rootedness in the country—rather than to change the decades-long principle of non-integration for so-called 'low-skilled' migrants less deprived of skills than the sought-after and already accumulated capital.

2.2 From Free Zones to Freehold Property Rights

⁸ See Kristin Surak (2021: 289–300) for the history of the different discretionary economic citizenship and residence by investment schemes since the late 1980s until the formalisation of citizenship by investment by 2006 in St Kitts.

Bending the established rules to the benefit of investors has arguably had precedents in the Gulf. It affected businesses before it was applied to individuals. As a matter of fact, since the time of independence, foreign companies in the GCC states have been subject to rules framing their access to business ownership and in particular the obligation for each foreign investor to contract a partnership (*wikala*) with a national actor or agent who must be the majority shareholder of the company.

Robert Mogielnicki (2021) shows how these initial rules of compulsory partnership, among others, were circumscribed by the establishment of free zones. Borrowing the definition from Thomas Farole, an economist at the World Bank, he defines free zones as ‘demarcated geographic areas contained within a territory’s national boundaries where the rules of business are different from those that prevail in the national territory’ (ibid.: 5). More specifically, a free zone presents three special features of ‘permitting full foreign ownership of commercial entities, offering reduced workforce nationalization requirements, and providing duty and tax exemptions’ (ibid.: 5–6). Since the 1980s and the establishment of the iconic Jebel Ali free zone in Dubai, free zones have carved exemptions to fundamental rules and encroached on privileges reserved only to citizens, in particular in the case of access to ‘ownership’ nullifying the requirement of the *wikala* contract or partnership.

At the level of individuals, further exceptions were made to the rules that, prior to the millennium, prohibited foreign ownership of real estate in the GCC countries within their borders. However, since the 2000s, all the GCC states have permitted some form of ownership to foreigners affluent enough to afford to buy property, subject to some restrictions. Not all are linked to actual residence in the country, and they are sometimes considered as investment assets first and foremost.

In Bahrain, for example, foreigners are permitted to own freehold title, but only within designated approved zones, such as certain tourism developments as well as residential areas like Durrat Al Bahrain, Seef, Abraj Al Lulu, Reef Island, Diyar Al Muharraq, Amwaj Islands, Juffair, Riffa and Saar (Era Projects 2022; EDB Bahrain 2022). In the UAE, each emirate is free to enact its own legislation with respect to foreign ownership of land (UAE Government 2021a). In Abu Dhabi, foreigners are never permitted to hold true freehold deeds, but they can hold quasi-freehold interests in ‘floors’ and units of buildings within designated areas (without possessing the underlying land itself) as well as long-term leaseholds in designated areas only that

take the form of a contract of a minimum of 25 years, *musataha* or usufruct (ibid.).⁹ Meanwhile, in Dubai, 'foreign ownership is permitted, also in areas designated as freehold [such as the Dubai Marina]. Foreigners (who don't live in the UAE) and expatriate residents may acquire freehold ownership rights over property without restriction, usufruct rights, or leasehold rights for up to 99 years' (ibid.).¹⁰

In Qatar, foreigners were initially permitted to hold freehold deeds within three designated areas (the Pearl-Qatar, West Bay Lagoon and the Al Khor Resort project), which were extended by Cabinet Resolution No. 28 of 2020 to nine areas, along with the possibility to hold long-term leaseholds (of up to 99 years) over real estate in 16 other 'investment areas' (Library of Congress 2021).

In Oman, the designated areas where foreigners may acquire freehold property are specific investment zones designated by the Ministry of Tourism as 'integrated tourist complexes'.¹¹ Additionally, foreigners may own long-term leaseholds (of up to 50 years) subject to the conditions set out in the leasehold document (known as a usufruct), which typically restricts the use of the land for a fixed purpose and to the approval of the Council of Ministers.

In Saudi Arabia, where foreigners are entitled to own real estate property except in the holy cities of Mecca and Medina, a number of restrictions apply but of a somewhat different kind: a foreigner must hold a valid legal residency status, obtain approval from the Ministry of the Interior, have no other property in the kingdom and buy for residence purposes. Non-resident foreigners are barred from property ownership.

Finally, Kuwait has some of the strictest foreign ownership restrictions in the GCC. The Real Estate Ownership Law No. 47 of 1979 prohibits foreigners from owning land with the exception, in Article 3, of non-GCC Arab nationals, provided they are permanent residents and have sufficient income, and the property does not

⁹ According to the official website, 'There are nine areas in Abu Dhabi, where foreigners are allowed to own real estate properties. They are: Yas Island, Saadiyat, Reem, Mariya, Lulu, Al Raha Beach, Sayh Al Sedairah, Al Reef and Masdar City' (UAE Government 2021a). A *musataha* is a long-term (up to 50-year) lease with possibility to use, construct or alter the property while a usufruct is also a long-term (up to 99-year) lease, but development of the land is not permitted.

¹⁰ Article 3 of Regulation No. (3) of 2006 Determining Areas for Ownership by Non-Nationals of Real Property in the Emirate of Dubai indicates the land plots designated as freehold properties (Legal Advice Middle East 2006).

¹¹ Foreigners may acquire property of undeveloped land, but the owner is required to construct buildings on the land within a period of four years during which they cannot dispose of the land. If the owner fails to develop the land within four years, the Ministry of Tourism then has the authority (if it fails to grant an extension) to dispose of the land.

exceed 1,000 m². Even then, ownership must be approved by the minister of justice (Mamlouk 2015). Any attempt to change this has sparked controversy in Kuwait (*Gulf States Newsletter* 2021). As per business ownership, to come back to this briefly, a different logic from that of the free zones analysed above applies here: the Foreign Direct Investment Law No. 8 of 2001 created an exception to Commercial Law No. 68 of 1980,¹² by allowing foreigners to own up to 100% of a commercial entity—a guaranteed right to use the land for as long as the business is operating thereon—where the entity operates in select industrial sectors such as infrastructure, insurance, hospitals, housing, tourism and entertainment.

It should be noted here that differences exist among the GCC states. In Dubai property rights are accompanied by residence rights which is not the case everywhere, like Kuwait, or Saudi Arabia where the legislation granting foreigners access to freehold properties does not provide for residence rights so that property owners losing their *iqama* or residence permit must sell their properties.

2.3 New Long-term Residency and Citizenship Schemes and Their Rationale

A new trend has emerged towards the establishment of schemes granting long-term residency or citizenship to the highly skilled and wealthier expatriate population. Not all are driven by the same guiding principles and, as result, have different implications for foreign residents and their children. Moreover, schemes ought to be differentiated between residence by investment (or talent) and citizenship by investment (or talent) as they do not grant the same benefits and present different requirements especially in terms of presence in the territory. According to Surak (2021: 278), ‘Unlike investor visa programs, also known as “golden visa” schemes, [in the citizenship by investment programmes] the intermediary step of legal permanent residence is eliminated or reduced to bureaucratic box-ticking’.

Since at least 2014 Bahrain has had a self-sponsorship residence permit scheme, bypassing the requirements of the *kafala* or sponsorship system, for ‘foreign retirees,

¹² This law prohibited non-GCC foreigners from engaging in business unless they have a Kuwaiti partner holding a minimum 51% stake or operate through a Kuwaiti agent.

foreign property owners and foreign investor[s]'. This grants renewable visas ranging from two years (BHD200 or USD532) to 10 years (BHD600 or USD1,596) and allows the sponsorship of dependents (Kingdom of Bahrain 2022). The scheme mixes requirements of work duration, or a minimum of 15 years' work in the GCC before retirement for retirees, and value of assets for property owners (minimum of BHD50,000 or USD133,000) or investors (minimum of BHD100,000 or USD266,000 in shares).

Furthermore, expatriates who have spent 25 years in the country (or Arab migrants who spent 15 years) can apply for citizenship if, in addition to legal duration spent in the country, they meet the following criteria: 'good conduct; fluency in Arabic; having a *registered real estate* in Bahrain' (my emphasis), the latter pertaining to the registration of real estate is to be noted as it already selects on the basis of assets, the applicants to nationality, leaving aside those who cannot afford to own a property (ILO 1963).¹³ While the documents required include education certificates or an employment certificate that may influence the decision of naturalisation, the initial scheme does not affect the application upon possessing particular occupations or talents, as advertised openly elsewhere in the Gulf. The category of 'foreigner with talent', 'nominated by a government agency in certain fields' was indeed added, along with that of 'resident (employee or retired)' in the Golden Residency scheme, allowing the categories of retirees (with a salary [*sic*] of BHD4,000 or USD10,640), property owners (this time of a value of BHD200,000 or USD532,000) and residents, earning not less than BHD2,000 or USD5,320 in the past five years to obtain work authorisation under a 10-year renewable residence permit that guaranteeing the sponsorship of immediate family members, with an issuance fee per person of BHD300 or USD798 (Kingdom of Bahrain 2022). The difference with the self-sponsorship visa seems to be the work authorisation.

In the UAE, Cabinet Resolution No. 56 of 2018 allows 'investors, entrepreneurs, specialised talents and researchers in various fields of science and knowledge, bright students with promising scientific capabilities' to apply for a golden visa of five or 10 years (UAE Government 2022). 'Investors in public investments of at least AED10 million' (USD2.72 million) and 'persons with specialised talents' are eligible for a

¹³ Historically, the Bahraini Citizenship Act law of 1937 was already coupled with the law regarding ownership of immovable property in Bahrain by foreigners (see Beaugrand 2007). Among the required documents today are a certificate from the Survey and Land Registration Bureau stating that the applicant owns property in Bahrain.

10-year visa (*ibid.*). Of interest is the fact that a spouse and children can also benefit from the visa, as well as in the case of investors one executive director and one adviser, turning the logic of residence (or possibly relocation) from a family to a corporate affair. Investors in a property in the UAE (worth AED5 million or USD1.36 million) or entrepreneurs (with a minimum capital of AED500,000 or USD136,000) and outstanding students are eligible for a five-year visa. The entrepreneurs' long-term visa includes a spouse and children, a partner and three executives, while families of outstanding students also benefit from the scheme. Although not explicitly mentioned, the targeted persons are presumably primarily, but not exclusively, foreigners already residing in the UAE, with multi-entry visa facilities also on offer.¹⁴

In January 2021 the UAE government went a step further. It launched a new citizenship allowing 'investors, doctors, specialists, inventors, scientists, intellectuals, individuals with creative talents' to 'be nominated for the UAE nationality' (UAE Government 2021b). With the same aim in sight, it adopted the UAE Strategy for Talent Attraction and Retention four months later in April 2021 (*Arabian Business* 2021). These last two measures came at a time of the generalisation of remote working in many countries across the world due to the Covid-19 pandemic, when Dubai and Abu Dhabi sought to attract white-collar remote workers.¹⁵ Yet a reading of the eligibility requirements points towards the fact that UAE residents are targeted at least in some of the categories: scientists must 'obtain a recommendation letter from recognised scientific institutions in the UAE', individuals with creative talents must provide a 'recommendation letter from related government entities', supposedly Emirati. While citizenship can be revoked, the official statement is clear about the fact that the families of a newly naturalised person would also be granted citizenship (WAM 2021).

¹⁴ Entrepreneurs, for instance, ought to have an *existing* project in the country, and one wonders how outstanding students from secondary schools would relocate from abroad (my emphasis). Yet the category of investors leaves more space for foreigners to invest their money in the country in 'passive investment' not requiring their active involvement, for instance, in the case of a 'deposit of at least AED10 million in an investment fund inside the country'.

¹⁵ The advertisement 'Work remotely from Dubai' on the visitdubai.com website offers a 'one-year virtual working programme' for USD611 that grants, in addition to the visa, 'access to all the standard services that residents benefit from, including telecoms, utilities, and schooling' (Visit Dubai 2022).

In a comparable vein, Saudi Arabia in turn launched its 'premium' residency programme in November 2019.¹⁶ On the website of the Saudi embassy in Washington, the scheme is presented in terms that intend to bestow social prestige to those benefiting from the scheme and clearly privileged in their treatment: 'The system coordinates with all sectors and state agencies to implement the Premium Residency System, which is *distinguished* for those who wish to obtain a *distinctive* residence in Saudi Arabia through its electronic services system, its various departments, and its direct contact with customers from everywhere' (Embassy of Saudi Arabia 2022, my emphasis). The premium residency scheme differentiates between a permanent residency visa and a renewable one-year permit, with the recipients of the former paying SAR800,000 (USD213,000) to obtain it and those of the latter disbursing SAR100,000 (USD26,700).¹⁷ The Premium Residency Center later announced a list of 73 people from 19 countries, and selected from thousands of applicants among foreigners, who were granted the permanent residency (Freer 2019). The scheme offering permanent residency, sometimes referred to as a 'golden visa', allows the recipients to do business freely in the kingdom without Saudi sponsors or partners, facilitating their access to property ownership. Recipients can change jobs without contacting sponsors, exit the country without permission and sponsor family member visas. Following rather closely in the footsteps of the UAE, Saudi Arabia also announced in November 2021 the issuance of a royal decree granting Saudi citizenship to 'experts and exceptional global talents' in religious, medical, scientific, cultural, sports and technological fields (Al-Monitor 2021). The proclaimed goal was to create an 'attractive environment' for foreign investment to support the country's Vision 2030 plan, and its goal of economic diversification through the promotion of industries like tourism.

Just like in the UAE, these measures granting residency and citizenship are conceived and advertised as part of the country's long-term attempts to diversify away from oil. 'Golden visa programmes', according to Courteney Freer (2019), 'show that foreign residents are increasingly being seen as assets, able to contribute to economies

¹⁶ It is handled by the Premium Residency Center, 'established in conjunction with a Royal decree, with the approval of the Council of Ministers ... as an independent administrative and financial agency, associated with the Economic Affairs and Development Council [created by King Salman in 2015, and headed by the Crown Prince]', according to the website of the Saudi embassy in Washington DC (Embassy of Saudi Arabia 2022).

¹⁷ The scheme is open to all who are over 21, can demonstrate their health, financial solvency and clean criminal record in addition to the payment of fees.

of these states which are not diversifying as quickly as they may have been expected to'. In a 2009 article, Michael Herb (2009: 387) demonstrated the difference in the perception of foreigners' roles in Kuwait and the UAE: 'Foreigners in Kuwait generate convenience; in Dubai, foreigners generate foreign exchange'. This logic has been pushed further, but while all foreign residents somehow generate foreign exchange, only a few handpicked people can drive economic growth through innovation or remarkable knowledge or practice. And it is through this neoliberal vision of competition and attraction of talents that the long-lasting question of the transnational generations' integration is now being analysed and handled via public policy.

Mira Al-Hussein (2021) notes differences in the way Saudi and Emirati authorities have granted citizenship to 'handpicked expatriates': 'The number of naturalised Saudi citizens appears to be small, relative to the size of country's population, and homogenous insofar as the grantees were Arab and Muslim—two differences that sets its social trajectory apart from the UAE's and highlight how citizenship schemes can impact the social contracts of each Gulf state differently'. Saudi Arabia officially posted the list of naturalised persons,¹⁸ whereas the UAE operated in a more opaque fashion, withholding the names, which were 'selectively' revealed through official media, and purposely or inadvertently leaked through social media. Al-Hussein sees in this process a certain embarrassment on the part of the UAE to naturalise non-Muslims, or, one can speculate, to make public the full list of nominees more broadly. As a matter of fact, Gulf passports, like the Emirati one, give access to countries in Europe, which other nationalities in the Arab world and also other parts of the world may not benefit from.¹⁹ She links the quiet Emirati strategy of naturalisation to its broader programme of reforms willing to accommodate the non-Muslim population of the country. For instance, in addition to the change in weekend days in January 2022, Law No. 14 of 2021 on Non-Muslims' Personal Status in the Emirate of Abu Dhabi, issued in November 2021, provides for a dedicated Family Court with the power to

¹⁸ This can be compared to the practice in Kuwait where the names of people naturalised have been published officially and to be found in the press (Beaugrand 2018: 246n42). Among those included in the 2019 Saudi list were: three top footballers playing in the kingdom, 'multiple renowned doctors and clerics, several professors at King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals and an Iraqi academic who has written extensively about Saudi Arabia's history' (Al-Monitor 2021).

¹⁹ Citizenship by investment in Cyprus, for instance, is known to be a way for wealthy Russians to access the Schengen area (see below).

decide matters related to marriage, divorce, inheritance and child custody for non-Muslims (Abu Dhabi 2021).

Overall, in the UAE and Saudi Arabia, the rationale of the long-term residency and citizenship schemes is to attract and retain people not only with a high purchasing power but also with 'economic added value', or, in other terms, the capacity to foster innovations in the economy. While the beneficiaries of the measures include all the deserving and brilliant residents presumably already present in the country, the schemes do not seem to stress in their eligibility criteria any explicit form of long-term residence, nor do they mention any precedence given to transnational generations. On the contrary, as pointed out by Al-Hussein (2021), the Emirati schemes also include wealthy people with tenuous links to the UAE, the prime if caricatured example being the French actor Gérard Depardieu, who boasted in February 2022 about being 'a citizen of Dubai' where his boat is moored while already holding a Russian passport in addition to his French passport (Trollion 2022; Garcin 2022; see also *Le Monde* 2013).

By contrast, Qatar—which also has a record of naturalisation of foreign sportsmen at the whim of the prince—has been tying its permanent residency permit more explicitly with the 'people born and raised in Qatar', who are identified by nationals as a group that should be given priority in the participation of the evolving economy, just like 'children of Qatari women'. Law No. 10 of 2018 enables residents of 20 years if born outside Qatar and 10 years if born there to apply for 'permanent residency permit' subject to income, 'good behaviour' and Arabic knowledge requirements (Qatar 2018). Permanent residency bestows the right to own a business without a Qatari sponsor, own a property and access free education and health care. The government portal boasts that permanent residency in Qatar is 'an honour to residents in the country and benefiting from their *competencies and expertise*' and the 'first of its kind in the Gulf and Arab region' (Qatar 2022, my emphasis). Arguably, the logic is quite significantly different from those of the UAE and Saudi Arabia cases, as Qatar endeavours to take into account the length of residence in the country besides sheer talent, even though the scheme is careful not to make it systematic for any resident. It should be noted that the drafting of the new law on residency was announced in 2017 after the beginning of the diplomatic rift with the Saudi, Emirati and Bahraini states, at a time when Qatar needed full support from all its residents.

Lastly, it is worth mentioning the two remaining GCC countries that have just adopted or are yet to adopt this kind of scheme. Oman has presented a strategy that borrowed elements from the various schemes existing in Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and the UAE. On 29 September 2021 the Ministry of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotions launched a programme allowing long-term residency to certain types of investors (Oman 2021). The new programme aims at attracting and retaining individuals who can invest in either property or companies or are looking for options to retire in Oman. Noticeable is the conspicuous absence or rather lagging of Kuwait in adopting any type of such scheme so far, despite an announcement in November 2021 that a measure should be issued (Nasrallah 2021). This somehow mirrors the lack of initiative on the part of Kuwait in matters relating to making the country attractive to foreigners, an observation already made by Herb (2009) but still very valid (Beaugrand 2021).

Overall, and with certain differences across states, the new drive towards naturalisation is dictated by a pure economic logic that locates foreigners in hierarchies according to an assessment of their economic value and accumulated capital or contribution to the post-oil economy.²⁰ While the 'handpicking' of naturalised persons is nothing new, the formalisation, by law and decrees, of its criteria and requirements in economic terms is. This approach is different from other political logics and societal models offering systematic naturalisation, as per the rule of law. Many countries accepting migrants profess some kind of integration in various forms (from multiculturalist to assimilationist tendencies) and the granting of nationality to virtually all applicants on the basis of requirements including a minimal residency duration and sometimes considerations of the willingness to join the citizenry or a measure of integration (like the test of 'Britishness'). Yet this approach of assessing individual economic contributions is comparable to schemes targeting high-net-worth individuals. In any case, the selection of applicants who are deemed worthy of having long-term residency or citizenship is not meant to address the fate of the transnational generation's integration. It is designed to tackle economic transition in the context of global competition.

²⁰ This capital is first and foremost economic and financial, but can also be cultural and symbolic.

2.4 Global Trends: From Privileged Elite Mobility to Individual Investors' Multi-residency

In a sense, the GCC countries are just taking part in more global trends where sovereign states have competed, throughout the twentieth century, to attract artists, intellectuals or scientists (and still do) and now compete to attract private wealth and investments.²¹

The new 'golden visa' measures adopted in the GCC countries ought to be historicised and contextualised: they in fact lag behind and are far from being the first countries granting investor visas. Canada has had a Business Immigration Program since 1978 (Harrison 1996). This then turned into a very successful Federal Immigrant Investor Program in 1986 that spared applicants from being actively involved in the day-to-day running of their business, and thus freed them from being physically present in the country and allowed them to make a passive investment that gave them access to a temporary residence which became permanent after a period of three years.²² Both the United States and Britain followed in Canada's footsteps, with the US EB-5 Investment Program launched in 1990, which requires a USD1 million investment in any business that will create at least 10 jobs, and the British Tier 1 (Investor) Visa programme established in 1994. The British programme allowed investors with a minimum of GBP2 million (USD2.3 million), a threshold raised in 2015, in British bonds or shares through a bank to apply for residency rights. It was closed in the aftermath of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 (Jolly 2022). Other countries like New Zealand, Australia, Singapore, Austria and Bulgaria also developed similar programmes. This type of scheme was designed to attract foreign fortunes but also, as seen in the case of Russian investors in Britain, was blamed for helping the recycling of money acquired through illegal practices.

Likewise, the Gulf's citizenship programmes are not per se a creation out of the blue. Some precedents do exist, especially in the fiscal havens of the Caribbean where invested money is exempt from taxes, as in St Kitts and Nevis and the Dominican

²¹ See, for instance, how Paris benefited from its reputation as the 'capital of the arts' in the exhibition *Paris: Capital of the Arts, 1900–1968* at the Royal Academy of Arts, London (26 January–19 April 2002) and Guggenheim, Bilbao (31 May–26 September 2002). See also how the US attracted foreign-born talents (Kerr 2018).

²² The fee of CAD150,000 (USD117,000) increased to CAD250,000 (USD195,000) in 1988 and eventually to CAD800,000 (USD623,000) (Surak 2021: 292). According to Surak (*ibid.*: 293), the 'numbers soared to the thousands annually ... driven by demand from Hong Kong and Taiwan'.

Republic (Abrahamian 2015). The most recent examples are in Europe, with Cyprus and Malta as cases in point. Cash-strapped Cyprus set up a 'scheme for naturalisation of investors in Cyprus by exception' on 24 May 2013. It mainly targeted non-European Union (EU) residents, in particular Russian investors, who would get, through the acquisition of EU citizenship, access to the Schengen area in addition to visa-free access to 160 countries. The same year, Malta passed a regulation on Citizenship by Naturalisation for Exceptional Services by Direct Investment which grants citizenship to applicants who have had one to three years lawful residency and can pay EUR600,000 or EUR750,000 (USD595,000 or USD744,000) to the national development and social fund. This scheme attracted attention and condemnation from the European Parliament and European Commission.

Nationality has become a real business. Private companies such as Henley & Partners specialise in advising wealthy individuals on how to obtain several passports to ease their life and their mobility, as well as governments on how to attract high-net-worth individuals. In 2020 the Citizenship by Investment Property Fair and Conference (CBIPF) in Beirut, Lebanon, was, according to its promotional material, at its sixth edition, with experts including legal consultants and property developers providing advice on how to apply for and obtain these visas, long-term residencies and citizenship. So the Gulf states, no matter their budget surpluses, are just following the global trends of capturing flows of people endowed with economic, social and cultural capital.

Until recently, the strategy—in particular of the UAE, but also Qatar—was to attract mobile elites, those studied by Anne-Catherine Wagner (2007, 2010) who argues that globalisation could allow the upper classes to 'move around while feeling at home' (Wagner 2010: 90, my translation). In other words, they could use mobility as a social and economic resource and possessed enough socioeconomic capital to feel at home as much in Hong Kong as in Abu Dhabi, whether they were on temporary expatriate contracts or business trips. Beth Harrington (2013) shows brilliantly how the museum projects of Saadiyat island addressed the needs of these privileged migrants: 'the neoliberal structuring of Saadiyat reveals itself in the way it only targets those who can afford particular consumptions, differentiates them according to class and consumption preferences and then channels them into distinct areas, facilitating speedy flows and quick turnover'. With the new long-term residency and citizenship schemes, the Gulf states push a notch further in the direction of elitist and

classist differentiation. They continue to ignore the situation of the large numbers of much-needed migrant workers working in mid-level services let alone the low-paid occupations and lower echelons of the construction or tourism industries, while catering to the needs of a class that collects nationalities and rights of residence to secure their own mobility but also as many rights as they can wherever they move to. As noted by Al-Hussein (2021): 'Gulf citizenships are precarious in their revocability. To assuage this common anxiety, Gulf states broke from the traditional rigidity against allowing their citizens to hold dual nationalities, assuring prospective citizens that they can retain their existing citizenships'. It should be noted that this new elitist logic defies not only the rights of lower-skilled and long-term foreign residents but potentially also those of native citizens themselves, who are not part of this mobile class because they hold only their 'select' Gulf citizenship (Beaugrand 2020: 431–433). They also are rendered economically immobile outside of the Gulf region because of 'decades of state-provided employment and subpar education systems [that] have consistently failed to equip generations with internationally marketable job skills' as well as the cultural capital 'to move while feeling at home' (Al-Hussein 2021; Wagner 2010: 90).

2.5 Conclusion

This chapter has taken as its object the new trend observed throughout the six GCC countries of granting rights of property, residence and even citizenship to selected foreigners whose economic or financial assets or skills are deemed valuable contributions to economies desperately trying to turn the page on the period of oil-driven growth. While, based on Western precedents, analysts hypothesised that the rootedness of second- and third-generation residents could eventually lead to greater legal integration, this is not the case. Noora Lori (2019: 140) very perceptively notes that this did not happen in the West without a struggle within state institutions and without the key role of the courts upholding and updating the interpretation of the law and rights, an avenue that is foreclosed for Gulf migrants.

On the contrary, the gradual bending of the principle of non-integration in the Gulf comes from another direction, namely upper-class migrants. In the worldwide

competition to attract individuals richly endowed with economic, financial and cultural capital, the generations-long residents of the Gulf countries may have assets, like multilingual skills, biculturalism and access to new Western education institutions, but have in no way any competitive advantage or priority (apart from the special case of Qatar that can be explained by the shock inflicted by the blockade). Yet, even in the most favourable case, naturalisation remains conditional on a utilitarian assessment of each individual's value to the economy.

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