Migration, Urban Commodification and the "Right to the City" in the GCC

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Online: 22nd of July 2018

This version is the non-copyedited, publicly available version. The official printed version can be found in:

AlShehabi, O. (2014), "Rootless Hubs: Migration, Urban Commodification and the 'Right to the City' in the GCC" in Khalaf, A., O. AlShehabi and A. Hanieh (eds.), *Transit States: Labour, Migration and Citizenship in the Gulf*, (London: Pluto Press), 101-31.

Keywords: Gulf Cooperation Council, Commodification, Urbanism, Migration, Right to the City

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Special thanks to Steffen Hertog for his comments on an earlier draft. This research was partly carried out with the support of the Arab Council for the Social Sciences – "Inequality, Mobility and Development in the Arab Region" Program 2013-2014.

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Discussion of migration in the GCC has traditionally exclusively focused on labour. This paper focuses on other dimensions of migration which have started emerging over the first decade of the 21st century in the Gulf Arab States. These other aspects of migration will be highlighted through the lens of "international mega-real estate projects" (IMREPs). I will argue that these newly emergent mega real estate projects highlight a marked shift in citizen-state-expatriates dynamics within the region. This is evident in two central ways. Firstly, expatriates are not only workers and source of man power, but increasingly they are also consumers, investors, owners of property and users of the urban space – indeed persons involved in diverse activities which I summarize using the phrase "agents that animate the city"[2].

Secondly, such mega-real estate projects point to an underlying vision that has been guiding the establishment and development of the cities under consideration, which I term derooted urbanism.[3] The guiding principles of derooted urbanism are defined by two features: 1. The increasingly important role of IMREPs aimed at expatriates as a final consumer within the local economic and spatial frontiers, making them new urban "centres" in a unique form of urban segmentation and commodification 2. Although a host of enticements and benefits are placed on offer to attract expatriates as the primary targets for such projects, expatriates are ultimately denied *de jure* the possibility to live and settle within GCC societies permanently. Thus, derooted urbanism is a vision that gears urban space production towards to a predominantly expatriate population, but where this population is conceived as being permanently temporary: one that is expected to spend a significant time in theses city, but is formally not allowed to establish permanent roots in them.

Such a vision, I argue, is inherently unstable, partly because of its transit nature, and partly because of the tensions it creates with "citizens" within society. The consequences of derooted urbanism will increasingly play a more significant role in power and social relationships between the state, business , citizens and expatriates, with a complex web of stratifications emerging that is mainly segmented across citizenship and economic class. Questions regarding the distribution

[2] I would like to thank Michelle Buckley for providing the inspiration for the phrase.
[3] The term is inspired by Simone Weil's work on *enracinement* (rootedness). See Weil (2003).

and usage of urban space and the "right to the city" will increasingly become contestable and more important in defining the relationship between these different groups within the smaller states of the GCC.

Critical urban studies is a largely virgin field within the academic literature focusing on the Gulf[4], particularly in relation to migration. To our knowledge, this is one of the first papers to analyze the relationship between migration and the new mega cities that have emerged across the GCC in the 21st century. The focus in this chapter will not be on the political economy of the production of such mega real estate projects (a topic that I have tried to address elsewhere in (AlShehabi, 2012)), but instead we cater the discussion to the spatial and demographic transformations that have accompanied them. The consequences of such projects for migration in the region could be potentially immense, raising several avenues of important and relevant research. These new cities are also a process that are still in development and in their nascent phase. Hence, the large scope of issues involved, the dearth of previous material on the topic, and the relatively new and ever-changing nature of the dynamics at play necessarily limits the depth that the chapter delves into. Instead, we focus more on providing an overview of the phenomenon and its ramifications.

We first begin by outlining the phenomenon of International Mega Real Estate Projects (IMREPs) in the four countries (Bahrain, Qatar, UAE and to a lesser extent Oman) who have adopted such IMREPS as a central platform of their economic visions, followed by a discussion of their implications for migration. We then turn to examining the new urban reality that is being formed as a consequence of these new real estate projects. Finally, we focus on what these new cities imply for power relationships in the GCC between citizens, expatriates, the business community and the state, and what might they indicate for the future of the region. We conclude by looking at the case study of Bahrain for the consequences of such cities.

1. The International Mega-Real Estate Projects

The real estate boom and bust over the first decade of the new millennium has come to be seen as a symbol of the global excesses of the period, with Dubai becoming the international icon of

[4] Notable exceptions include El Sheshtawy (2010) and Fuccaro (2001).

this phenomenon. The extent of the real estate boom in the GCC cannot be understated, constituting the bulk of economic activity in the region after the oil and gas sector. At the height of the oil boom in 2008, 57% of the value of all announced projects in the GCC - 1.2 trillion out of a total of 2.1 trillion USD - were directed towards these mega-real estate projects (AMEinfo, 2008). The 10 biggest projects in the GCC were of the mega-real estate variety, worth about 393 billion USD (MEED, 2010). The infrastructure needed to make such projects a reality included planned energy projects worth 134 billion USD, and water and sewage infrastructural spending worth another 40 USD. It was estimated that demand for desalinated water and electricity was to increase at an annual rate of 8% and 10% consecutively (EDC, 2007) (Augustine, 2009). The scale of these projects was so immense that a third of global project finance flowed to the region in 2006 (Hanieh, 2011, p.110).

As a consequence of these investments, the growth in the real estate sector was staggering. In Bahrain, the sector grew by a compound annual growth rate of 7.1% between 2003 and 2007, while in Kuwait the annual rate reached 8.7% between 2002 and 2007. In Oman it grew by 10% between 2003-2007, while in Qatar it reached 39.2% in the same years, with the UAE registering 24.5%. Overall, revenues grew by more than 37% annually between 2002 to 2008, for the overall revenues growth to reach more than 500% in this period (Ellaboudy, 2010).

These real estate projects were in large part a state-driven and shaped process in conjunction with the “private” sector. The policies, energies and legislation of these four countries have not only enabled such projects, but they have centrally focused on propelling them and making them at the center of their economies. Indeed, many of the real estate companies driving these projects, such as Emaar or Dubai World, were state owned enterprises or controlled by ruling family members. Nothing highlights the central role played by the state in driving the real estate growth more than the most important economic documents produced by the GCC states, the so-called “economic visions”.

Officially, the “Economic Visions” focused on the goalsand aspirations of these countries over the next few decades, outlining the economic and social strategies that would be employed to reach them. These economic visions were written primarily by western consultancy firms employed by the local rulers. The extent of the phenomenon of hiring non-local firms to write, shape and outline the whole economic vision and strategy for a county represents to my knowledge a unique and unprecedented situation of entrusting a nation's economic future to outsiders.[5]

The Bahrain Economic Development Board announced its 2030 vision, and Abu Dhabi followed suit with its own 2030 vision. Not to be outdone, Qatar also laid out its own 2030 vision, while Dubai outlined a "Strategic Plan 2015". The first stand-out characteristic of these visions is the remarkable similarity they depict in the language and terms used. Furthermore, very similar strategies are outlined within them, as if they were written by the same hands.

What emerges from reading these economic visions is the almost compulsive obsession with increasing global business competitiveness and openness towards foreign direct investment. Terms such ease of doing business, property rights, competitiveness, investor perception, and international hub pop up regularly . At the centre of these visions lie the mega real estate projects. A detailed exposition is not possible here, but some excerpts are sufficient to relay the above points:

> "Bahrain is conveniently located at the heart of the GCC, and provides a gateway to Asia, Europe and Africa. In addition to the region's standard economic incentives – zero taxation for private companies, few indirect taxes for private enterprises and individuals, and free movement of capital – Bahrain offers one hundred percent foreign ownership of business assets and real estate in most sectors of the economy. " P.8 – Bahrain 2030

> "Bahrainis welcome foreigners into their country, integrating them into their community in the true Islamic tradition of tolerance and hospitality. As a result, the population is diverse, living and working together peacefully." P. 8. – Bahrain 2030

> "When it comes to property rights, the passing of recent legislation formalising the right of foreigners to own real estate has shown that Abu Dhabi is actively seeking to protect the property rights of all in the Emirate. Foreign nationals are now permitted to own real

[5] The huge expansion of these western consultancies was a phenomenon unique to the region, where their growth was to encompass all areas in the economy, including security and legal matters. It is probably unsurprising in the GCC, however, where the vast majority of the labour force is composed of expatriates, and where importation of everything from labour to consumer commodities is the norm.

> estate in the Emirate within specially designated zones. The Government intends to expand property rights further for foreign investors." P.50 - Abu Dhabi 2030

> "The level of foreign ownership remains low within the Emirate, thus indicating an opportunity to boost FDI and speed-up the roll-out of leading edge technologies, business processes and management practice to the rest of the economy." P. 49 - Abu Dhabi 2030

Thus, such projects were not only facilitated by the state, but indeed they constituted a central part of their economic strategies. Governments rolled out supportive visions and provided the general environment and the material means to make these mega real estate projects a reality.

2. New forms of migration?

The question that necessarily arises is to whom are these projects that have become a central mantelpiece of the countries' visions destined? Given the small national population of these countries, it quickly becomes clear that such projects cannot be targeted towards citizens as final users, but they would necessarily have to be geared towards expatriates as end-users. Otherwise, such projects necessarily will end up being ghost towns.

By the start of the new millennium, a batch of real-estate laws in four out of the six GCC countries were introduced that explicitly opened the door for the purchase of real estate by non-citizens for the first time in the region. Bahrain announced that it will allow expatriates to buy real estate in 2001, Dubai quickly followed suit in 2002, and 4 of the remaining six UAE emirates consequently joined the bandwagon. Qatar and Oman incorporated such laws in 2004 and 2006 consecutively. Saudi Arabia and Kuwait hesitated regarding adopting similar laws , but in 2010 Saudi Arabia announced that King Abdullah Economic city will be the first place where foreigners are allowed to buy real estate. Thus Kuwait remains as the sole country that is yet to announce the introduction of similar laws[6], although there have been growing calls by the business community to adopt them.

[6] Which is unsurprising considering that Kuwait has the strongest national democratic tradition in the region.

In tandem, legislation that linked the purchase of real estate to the right to obtain residency permits was passed in the four countries that opened up to international real estate markets. Bahrain legislated for 5 year residency visas that are automatically renewed with the continued ownership of the property, while the UAE announced the introduction of 3 year renewable visas after first limiting them to 6 months. Qatar and Oman followed Bahrain in opting for 5 year renewable residency visas.

These laws paved the way for a huge boom in the construction of such “international mega-real estate projects” (IMREPs). At the height of the boom in 2008, extremely conservative estimates show that there were plans to build more than 1.3 million units that allow for foreign ownership within these four countries. If one conservatively assumes 3 individuals per unit, that implies a capacity to house more than 4.3 million individuals. The total combined number of citizens of these four countries in 2008 was 3.8 million. If these projects were to materialize in their totality[7], they would have the potential to house more individuals than the total of all the citizens of these four countries. Thus, for these projects to have any viability, they necessarily must be geared towards expatriates.

Table 1: Announced number of international real estate units in 2008 that are completed or planned to be built by 2020 (thousands)

Country		Number of Units	Total Capacity	Number of Citizens
UAE		1104	3544	892
	Abu Dhabi	180	759	-
	Dubai	690	2070	-
	Ajman	28	83	-
	Um Al Quwain	183	548	-
	Ras Al Khaimah	28	84	-
Bahrain		60	180	538
Oman		94	282	1967
Qatar		67	324	220
Total		**1329**	**4330**	**3617**

* The huge number in Um Al Quwain is due to the White Bay project which was eventually cancelled.
Source: Author calculations from various resources. For in-depth calculations see (AlShehabi, 2012).

[7] The 2009 financial crisis cancelled or put on hold many of these projects, while other new ones have also emerged.

But who are these expatriates that must be attracted to these real estate projects? Data on this issue is limited. The real estate boom was still in the speculative phase when the financial crisis hit the region in 2009, as laid bare by the fact that the main buyers in some of these countries were GCC speculators who were aiming to resell the properties for a higher profit. Furthermore, data is notoriously difficult to come across within the region on such issues.

There are some indirect indications, however. In Bahrain, the authorities announced in the 2010 municipality elections (where GCC residents and expatriates who own real estate are allowed to vote) that there were 8150 registered voters who were not citizens (Al-Wasat 2010). Given that the 2010 population census data shows there are about 3400 resident GCC citizens in Bahrain that are of the eligible voting age (Bahrain 2010 Census, 2010), this implies that there are several thousand non-GCC expatriates who own property (with this figure not including their families and dependants), a small but not insignificant proportion of the population.

The value of all real estate property bought in Bahrain by non GCC expatriates was BD 43.1 million in the first half of 2012 . This made up approximately 13.5% of total property dealings in Bahrain (whether IMREPs or not), with GCC citizens making up another 10%, and Bahrainis making up the remaining 76.5 % (Bahrain Survey and Land Registration Bureau, 2012).

Data from within these newly established international gated communities supports such numbers. In an interview with a senior employee in a district of Amwaj, one of the most established gated communities in Bahrain, they indicated that roughly 40% of owners are expatriates from outside the GCC, while the other 60% are owned by Bahrainis and other GCC members (with the proportion of Bahraini owners outnumbering those from the GCC). In terms of renting, the proportion is closer to 70% expatriates and 30% Bahrainis and GCC citizens, indicating that quite a few Bahrainis and GCC citizens are purchasing to rent to expatriates. [8]

According to the same employee, most of the expatriate buyers of property are British, followed by Americans, with a few from India and Pakistan. Most are usually working in Bahrain, and either looking for a long term investment or a home to live in. Thus, most are long term buyers.

[8] Interview with a manager of a IMREP facilities management company, 14 October 2012.

The situation has changed since the onset of the political crisis in Bahrain in 2011, as some expatriates have become nervous. Their selling rate has increased, with Bahrainis purchasing more of these units.

Dubai, the most advanced market for IREPs and the city that has become the envy and role model for many of the others, provides the most relevant data on the extent of the phenomenon. The first glaring difference in comparison to Bahrain is that of scale, with the size of trade in “mega-real estate” in Bahrain completely dwarfed by Dubai.

2006 Dubai data reveals that the number of Arab buyers (including GCC citizens) constituted 28% of all real estate transactions, with 72% coming from non-Arabs (FutureBrand, 2006, p. 12). The highest proportion of buyers by purchase value came from India (24%), followed by the United Kingdom (21%), and then Pakistan (12%) and Iran (10%) (FutureBrand, 2009, p. 70). This trend within purchasers seems to recur yearly, with Indians again topping the 2011 figures, spending 2.1 billion Dirhams, thus making up 16% of total expenditure on real estate in the emirate (India Real Estate Monitory, 2012). The new money flowing into the Dubai property market in 2011 from abroad totaled 13.13 billion dirhams.

In the first half of 2012, the total value of direct foreign investment in the real estate sector shot up to 22.1 billion AED (Dubai Land Department, 2012), with 12875 properties bought. Indians once again came top of the pile, buying 2153 properties valued at 3.751 billion AED, closely followed by Pakistanis with 1841 properties at 1.713 AED billion, and British investors coming third with 1564 properties worth 2529 billion AED.

Table 2: Real estate transactions in Dubai in the first half of 2012 by nationality

Nationality	Value (AED)	Number of Investors	Average Value per Investor
India	3,751,846,026	2,153	1,742,613
Pakistan	1,713,837,907	1,814	944,784
Britain	2,529,944,501	1,564	1,617,612
Iran	1,515,712,994	1,057	1,433,976
Russia	1,438,760,857	694	2,073,142
Saudi Arabia	1,059,886,515	416	2,547,804
America	694,529,969	415	1,673,566
Canada	754,015,467	329	2,291,840
Jordan	460,188,771	268	1,717,122
Other	8,234,221,965	4,165	1,977,004
Total	22,152,944,972	12,875	1,720,617

Source: (Dubai Land Department, 2012)

The above data shows that there are at least tens of thousands of expatriate property owners in Dubai.Informal evidence supports such data. Regardless of the owners of the real estate projects, any stroll through the streets of Dubai – the Marina district being a potent example - confirms that the majority of dwellers in these newly completed projects are expatriates, generally from non-Arab countries. This corroborates with information obtained from interviews with employees in such projects, who identify that the vast majority of buyers are expatriates who are not Arab.

An employee in one of these projects, for example, contends that there was a significant number of Iranian buyers during the intial phases of the real estate boom, since real estate ownership entitled them to a visa. Increasingly, Russians and Chinese started entering the market after the financial criss too, their main concern centering on investment and profit-making. Thus, in Dubai, the main motivations for buying were either flipping, investment or a visa. Some buyers were also living in the country, with many combining working with real estate ownership. [9]

What can also be assumed is that the price of buying and renting real estate in these projects necessarily entail that buyers and dwellers are from the middle to upper class strata of society. The average value of a real estate purchase in the first half of 2012, for example, was 1.7 million AED.

[9] Interview with a manager of a IMREP facilities management company, 14 October 2012.

X[10] is a typical example of owners of such property. She is a married mother of two from South Africa in her late thirties, who bought a 1 bed room flat in Dubai while working there at the height of the real estate boom in 2007. The flat is located in one of the newly built high rise developments in Jebel Ali Dubai. Although she no longer lives there, she still owns the flat. The primary reason for buying the apartment was as an investment. By 2012 when the interview was conducted, she had no choice but to hold on to the flat, as the price does not allow for a significant return on sale. Rental prices have dropped form 11,000 AED per month to nearly 3000 AED, and she had to make do with renting the flat to other expatriates living in Dubai.

It is not unusual for individuals from the above listed countries, particularly within Asia, to make up the bulk of the market in Dubai and indeed possibly the rest of the GCC. India, Pakistan and Iran have long historical, geographic, migratory and cultural links with the region, with a population bloc of more than a billion and a half between them. They also constitute the biggest proportion of migrant labour in the region. Figures show that there is between 3-5 million Indians alone working and living in the region. For Pakistan, the figure hovers around 1-2 million, while Iran has more than 200 thousand individuals (Kapiszewski, 2006). "Asians" overall constituted 92%, 59%, 46%, 65%, 80% and 87% of the expatriate labour market in Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain and UAE respectively (ILO, 2009). Furthermore, by the 21st century these countries no longer simply exporters of unskilled cheap labour to the region, with many of the middle class professionals in the gulf originating from them.

They have also witnessed a significant widening in their middle class base over the past few decades, providing a significant potential supply that can afford such real estate projects. In India, for example, the middle class was estimated at 50 million individuals in 2011, and it was expected to reach 580 million individuals by the advent of the year 2025 (Pilling, 2011).

The four GCC states studied here have made no secret of their wish to tap into this emerging globally affluent class. Indeed IMREPs were not the only outward-oriented ventures witnessed during the last decade. A plethora of new museums have emerged in the past decade (e.g. the Guggenheim in Abu Dhabi), as well as universities (e.g. Qatar educational city) andcultural

[10] The name has been changed to to protect interviewee's anonymity. 14 October 2012.

institutions and events (e.g. Oman's Royal Opera House) that cater mostly to an affluent foreign clientele.

Furthermore, there has been a concerted drive by all GCC countries to increase the global flow of goods and people passing through their air and sea ports, with the logistics, transportation, and tourism sectors becoming increasingly big drivers of their economies. By the beginning of 2014, there were 10 fully fledged international airports within the GCC[11]. The six countries saw more than 1.5 million flights pass through their airports in 2010[12], carrying well in excess of a hundred million passengers. Dubai International airport on its own carried more than 66 million passengers in 2013 at an annual increase rate of 15%, becoming the 7th busiest airport in the world (Dubai Airports, 2013). The national airlines of the of the GCC have increasingly become major players on the global level, frequently competing with and even buying out more established companies in Europe and the US. This boom in passenger movement was complemented with a huge increase in goods movement via an expanisve shipping and air cargo sector. Thus, becoming a "hub" for the global movement of goods and people has become a central part of the visions and economies of the GCC. This was complemented with a concerted effort to become serious "international cities", moving beyond the "standard" image of the oil sheikhdoms and indeed even becoming tourist destinations. Naturally, a large flow of people, the vast majority of whom are not citizens of the GCC, became a central pillar to this model of "transit states". What happens once a significant proportion of these individuals are no longer simply passing through the region, and are actually spending a substantial part of their lives in it? In other words, what about migrants to the gulf?

3. Expatriates: Beyond Labour

It is beyond doubt that one of the defining dichotomies of inhabitants of the GCC is between citizens and non-citizens i.e. migrants. There are a host of legal, economic and (as is discussed below) geographic distinctions between the two, starting from the "Kafala" law that controls the legal nature of expatriates presence in the GCC right to the exclusive social benefits that citizens

[11] These exclude regional-oriented only airports include one airport in Bahrain, two in dubai, one in Abu Dhabi, one in Qatar, 3 in Saudi Arabia, one in Oman and one in Kuwait.
[12] Author calculations from officially released statistics.

obtain. Furthermore, the ability for expatriates to become nationals is severely restricted and for all intents and purposes impossible[13], leading Long Va to describe the situation as that of an "ethnocracy", where " the acquisition of the defining feature of the ruling elite (citizenship) lies beyond the dominated groups (expatriates)." (Longva, 2005, p.125) .

This distinction between "nationals" and expatriates is inherent in nearly all academic discussions of migration in the modern era of the GCC. Nearly equally ingrained is viewing the sole economic role of expatriates as exclusively based on labour provision. Expatriate workers are seen as a necessary input for economic growth, in essence a productive factor that is needed for the crucial supply of labour. However, as the GCC economies have continually expanded to become global hubs for the movement of goods and people, this chapter argues that migrants' economic roles within the region increasingly transcend pure labour considerations. Expatriates are increasingly ingrained as people that play multiple roles within GCC societies, and very often the same individual plays more than one role within this mesh.

No longer are expatriates simply needed as a source of "manpower", but they are enticed to the region as travelers, consumers, investors, and indeed inhabitants of the urban space of the region. They are a source of purchasing power that actively need to be marketed to, attracted, and recruited in order to travel through, buy, invest and even live in the region. The visions is for them to become "agents that animate the cities" of the Gulf, a phrase that signifies the multiple roles that people play in creating and interacting with the physical space of the cities in the gulf, whether through consuming in them, working in them, renting or buying real estate, and indeed living in them.

One obvious way is through consumption. Although private consumption as a percentage of GDP is notoriously low in the Gulf (hovering between 20-35% in comparison to roughly 60% in the OECD), expatriates increasingly make up a large bulk of consumption expenditure in the GCC, particularly in the smaller states.

Data from the 2009 household census in Dubai, for example, shows that out of total annual expenditure of 47.7 Billion AED , only 8.4 Billion AED (17.6%) came from national households, while expatriates constituted 82.4% of expenditure. Even expatriate sub-groups'

[13] With the (possible) exception of Bahrain. See below.

expenditure exceeded that of nationals. What is classified as “Asian Households”, for example, had double the expenditure (16.2 Billion AED) of nationals (9.2 billion AED). “Collective labours” had about the same level at 8.9 billion AED, while “European Households and the like” stood at more than half at 5.0 billion AED.

In Bahrain, average annual per capita expenditure in the 2005-2006 survey was 2255.66 BD for citizens (Table 3.90 in the census), while average per capita expenditure of expatriates registered higher at 2729.4 BD (Table 3.91) . Given that expatriates outnumbered citizens in 2012, this means that overall expenditure (assuming the same expenditure patterns) would be higher for expatriates than citizens. Similarly in Qatar, the average Qatari’s monthly individual expenditure from the 2008 household is 4335.55 QR, while the expatriate’s average monthly expenditure is 2903.84 QR. Given that Qatar’s expatriate population outranks the local population by a ratio of nearly 9:1, it becomes increasingly clear that the expenditure of expatriates is quite important in driving total private demand. Thus, expatriates play at least as equally important role in private demand, if not more, than local households in the smaller GCC states. This of course generates an economic role for a particular segment of expatriates as engines of private demand (however limited the overall role of the latter) within the GCC economies that goes beyond their role as providers of labour.

My main focus within this chapter, however, will specifically be on the international mega real estate projects that have been targeted towards an expatriate clientele as an illustration of the multiple roles played by expatriates that transcend labour. It is well known that real estate represents one of the greatest rent and income generators (after oil) in the region, whether through renting or sale of property. Prior to the new millennium, expatriates living in the region were not allowed to own real estate, and hence they were confined to rent and living in properties owned by nationals. Hence, local households have traditionally derived a significant proportion of income from real estate. A large proportion of such rented real estate is targeted towards expatriate tenants, making the latter a significant source of rent income for locals. For example, , local households in Bahrain indicate that they generate 21% of their income from real estate possessions (Table 4.43 from the 2005-2006 census), while in Dubai citizens indicate that 16% of income is derived from real estate (Table 02-03 in the census). In Qatar, the proportion of citizens' income from entrepreneurial and business activities, including real estate, reached 33% in 2006-2007 (Qatar Statistical Authority, 2010).

With the advent of these new mega-real estate projects, possession of real estate on a freehold or 99-year leasehold basis for expatriates was allowed, and as we outlined above was marketed as a primary engine of growth in the economy. The advent of these IMREPs provides a prime example of the qualitative and quantitative shifts in the economic roles played by expatriates in the region. The most hitherto discussed migration phenomenon in relation to these real estate projects focuses on the plight of construction workers brought in to build these projects. Poorly paid, inadequately housed, and with an extremely precarious and short-term stay in the country, there were more than 1.5 million expatriate construction workers in the GCC at the height of the real estate boom in 2008 (Baldwin-Edwards, 2011). Our focus in this here, however, is not on the workers involved in constructing these cities, instead, we direct our focus towards the envisaged inhabitants of these newly established cities.

Firstly, expatriates are increasingly becoming asset (and capital) owners within the region. Asset ownership obviously involves a different set of social relations when compared to labour providers and wage-earners. Part of this is certainly the social standing and influence that the purchase of real estate affords to its buyer, but it also entails radical changes in the legal and economic relationships with the rest of society's acctors.

One way this manifests itself is the legal status of expatriate real estate owners viz-a-vis local business, citizens and the state. Since local legislation in all four countries that have enacted freehold ownership for foreigners directly link real estate ownership to the right to obtain visas, owners are no longer tied to local sponsors for their residency, as is the case within the Kafala system. The link between a local sponsor, whether a citizen or business enterprise, and the expatriate is broken, with the sponsor now becoming the state directly. Expatriates are no longer dependent, theoretically at least, on any single individual or company for their stay. This breaks the traditional link that has characterized all previous expatriate relations and marks a milestone in state-citizen-expatriate relationship.

There are also important ramifications on sovereignty in terms of the legal ownership of the real estate projects and its infrastructure between the state, the real estate owner and the real estate project developer. For example, these new mega real estate projects are very often closed gated communities, where the individual unit owners jointly own all the common facilities, and where the estate is managed by a private contractor. Commonly-owned facilities could include roads, pavements and infrastructure. Tala, for example, is a closed gated community within the artificially constructed island of Amwaj in Bahrain, the latter also being a closed gated community itself. Residents jointly own many of the common spaces within Tala, which is managed by an appointed maintenance company (Tala Island Owners Association Agreement, 2007, p. 3).

On paper at least, the state has no ownership, claims or jurisdiction within these communities and their common facilities, which are in the domain of the homeowners' associations and project developers. In an interview with an employee in a leading Bahrain closed gated community, for example, he indicated that the only interaction with the local municipality and the state revolved around collecting refuse and paying the municipality tax and the electricity and water bills. It seems that there were a host of legal complexities inherent in the relationship between these new cities, the state and the wider community regarding ownership and usage of resources that were not completely resolved.

This phenomenon of independent "enclaves" has its precedents in the early gated communities of the international oil companies in the region (e.g. Bapco's Awali in Bahrain or Aramco in Saudi Arabia), and has resonance with the advent of various financial[14] and free zones[15] across the GCC, each with their separate jurisdictions, labour laws, and licensing rules. Such fragmentation of sovereignty has fundamental implications on the applicability and interactions of laws and regulations between these different jurisdictions and enclaves and indeed the state at large.

Furthermore, such real estate projects could entail a potentially fundamental shift in the way (a certain segment of) expatriates are able to mobilize and group. This is highlighted by the advent of the residents' associations springing within these new mega real estate projects. These residents associations legally allow real estate owners to group together and form a lobbying organization that jointly manages the affairs of the community, as well as jointly owning all the common properties. This allows real-estate owners to act in an organized and sustained

[14] e.g. Doha Financial Centre and Dubai International Financial Centre
[15] E.g. Jebel Ali Free zone

formation that is legally recognized, in a manner akin to unions (Tala Island Owners Association Agreement Draft, 2007, pp. 1-5). Unions, as is well known however, are an option currently not afforded to expatriate workers in the GCC.

X, the South African apartment owner in Dubai whom we met before, is a member of the homeowners' association of Nakheel, the developer of the gated community project where she owns a property. The homeowner association is extremely large and has thousands of members, which potentially allows for lobbying and concerted action. Indeed such concerted action has already been witnessed. For example, most of the maintenance in such real estate projects used to be run by the developers themselves as a monopoly, charging high rates in the process. Home owners' associations started a strong campaign directed towards the authorities against such practices, which eventually helped in introducing new legislation that allowed home owners to choosing their maintenance providers (The National, 2010).

4. Transit States and Derooted Urbanism

The phenomenon of mega-real estate projects was not only a GCC phenomenon. Indeed it was in many respects a global phenomenon typical of the financial boom at the dawn of twenty first century, with the urban expansion craze in condominiums witnessed in India, China and Spain being only the most glaring examples.

Two factors when combined make the situation in the GCC countries under consideration in my opinion unique: The first is the lopsided concentration of the local non-oil economic and spatial activity on these "international" real estate projects, with the resources geared to such projects reaching science-fictional proportions. Indeed these projects have a dominant presence within the physical landscape of the cities in the four countries that allowed for such projects, constituting new urban "centres" that exist in parallel to other urban spaces in an increasingly segmented city. The second is the fact that the GCC does not have the national population to support such real estate projects, which would necessarily mean catering them towards expatriates if these projects are to be in any realistic way viable. The catch, however, is that such non-citizen buyers are not allowed to permanently settle and integrate into the local society. These two factors when combined, create what I call the phenomenon of derooted urbanism.

Let us start by understanding the extent of these projects. A good starting is by looking at the newly laid out master plans for the GCC cities. These master plans outlined the new urban landscapes these city-states were to take, and as with the previously-discussed economic visions, they were designed in their entirety by western consultancy firms. Bahrain's master plan was entrusted to "Skidmore, Owings and Merrill", while in Qatar, Oriental Consultants, a Japanese firm, was charged with drawing its masterplan. Abu Dhabi's 2030 urban plan outlines its vision that by 2020 the emirates' inhabitants would reach 2 million residents living in 411,000 residential units, further increasing to 3.1 million residents by 2020 in 686,000l units, the vast majority of this increase being through a rise in expatriates' numbers, with the percentage of nationals projected to decrease even further (Abu Dhabi Urban Planning Council, 2007). The international mega real estate projects are destined make up a significant chunk of the new projects in these master plans.

Since conception, such projects were driven by a high degree of a top-down approach in the design and development of IMREPS. Indeed they frequently entail building entire cities along with their infrastructure completely from scratch. This 'top-down" planning, however, is frequently privatized. Although the state, as we saw, played a central role creating the overall economic environment that propelled these projects and made them prosper through its economic visions and spending on supporting infrastructure, the involvement of formal state institutions in the concrete planning and design of such projects varies. No longer are the configurations of the GCC cities in question dominated exclusively by the central-planning of an omni-present "petro-modernist state"[16] as was the case in the 1950s-1990s, when the layout and planning of neighborhoods, roads and urban environment was an exclusively state-driven process. Instead, the planning process for these new cities and projects has been frequently carried out by private firms and companies. Interviews with several architects and planners in private firms have indicated that plans and designs for new projects were frequently formulated, approved and put into practice by the companies involved in the project, with input by the relevant state and municipal authorities being a formality that often required little more than an afterthought. This is an extremely unusual and relatively recent development in the gulf, which any person who has

[16] See chapter 1.

gone through the heavily bureaucratized and state-regulated process of building a privately owned dwelling will attest to.

The scale of such projects is also immense, often covering an area of several kilometers squared and encompassing thousands of housing units. Such real-estate projects usually take one of two manifestations. They are either built as urban high-rise towers in commercial areas of the city, or they take on the form of gated communities of luxurious villas and apartments, usually by the seafront or in the desert.

Amwaj, a man-made island on 4 kilometers squared of reclaimed sea in northern Bahrain, is a typical example of these projects. It is a closed gated community, with several closed gated communities within the bigger project itself. An example of these projects is Tala, made of 90 villas and 585 apartments on the sea. Not far is the "Floating City", inspired by Venice, where water canals hug the 213 housing units in the project, allowing residents to moor their yachts (TEN Real Estate, 2011). Within the wider Amwaj project there is a school, several shopping malls, supermarkets, hotels and facilities that make it a closed-gate community in total independence of the surrounding environment. Currently Amwaj is one of the most expensive areas in Bahrain, and the most favored residential area for well-to do expatriates and professionals.

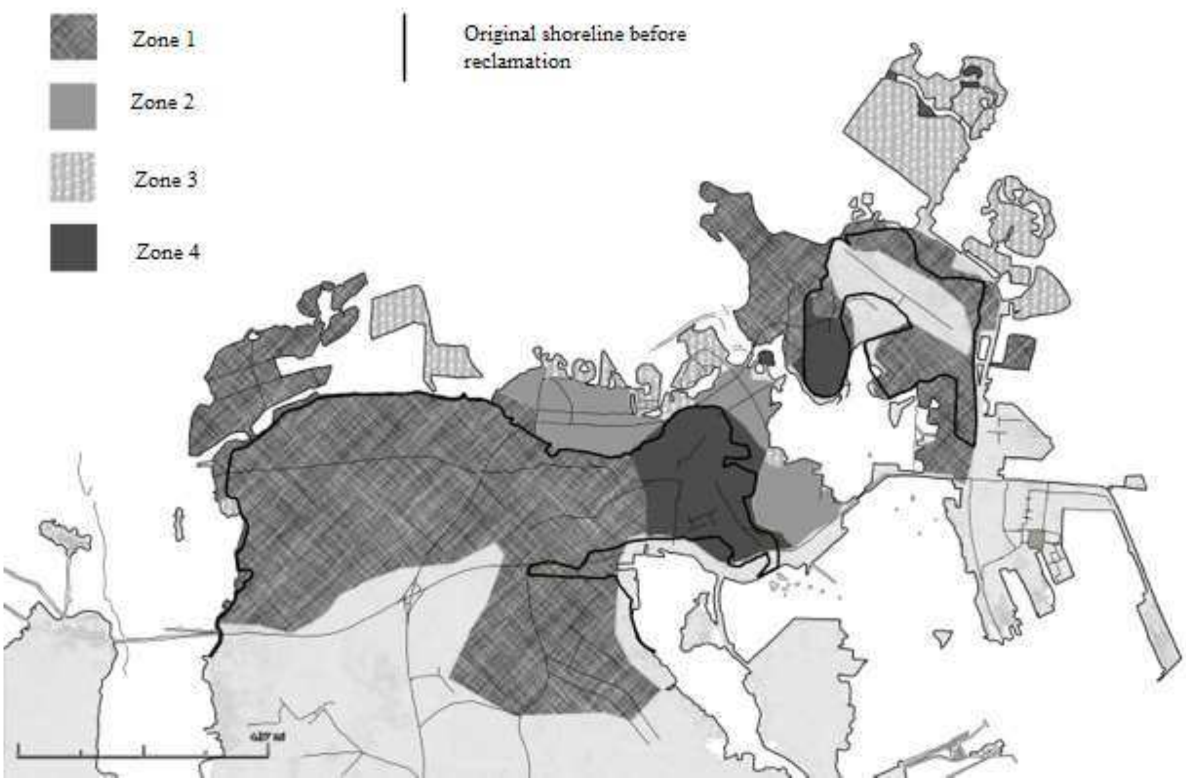
Dubai, the city that symbolized real estate drive more than any other, needed more than one masterplan to keep up with all the projects under construction. The now-suspended Waterfront project, for example, is projected to span an area of 1.5 billion squared feet, surpassing the size of Washington DC three times and accommodating up to 1.3 million residents. Its masterplan was designed by the famous Dutch designer Rem Koolhaas (Ouroussoff, 2010).

Upon reflection, the first thesis we propose should emerge as being quite obvious, but has so far received quite limited attention: the urban space of the cities of the smaller GCC states are significantly re-configured by these "international" mega real estate projects. Although such real estate projects are a work in progress, and although the numbers occupying them by the end of 2013 were still not at their peak, they had already generated a huge transformation in the physical space of the cities themselves. This transformation has had a profound impact on the natural environment, habitation patterns across the city, and in the relationship between locals, expatriates, the state, business community, and the built up area where theyinteract. To use the literature jargon, these projects represent new areas and forms of “centrality” in the city (as opposed to the periphery), at least in geo-economic terms, increasingly using up and having some of the best access to the resources the city has to offer.

The following illustration presents an aerial view of Dubai. Parts highlighted in the darker shade represent areas allocated to IMREPs. By nature, this is an incomplete list, and does not include projects that were yet to commence, which by the end of 2013 were many. The tag pin represents the location of the old city centre of Dubai.

“Build it and they will come”, went the famous adage in Dubai. It is still a matter of debate regarding whether they indeed they will come, but regardless of the numbers already inhabiting these cities, and regardless of whether all of the projects materialize or whether many end up as ghost towns, it immediately becomes obvious that these IMREPs already form a significant part of the urban landscape, occupying large swaths of real estate that is adjacent to the sea (in addition to newly reclaimed land). They also constitute some of the most easily identifiable, largest, and most iconic landmarks of the city. If we follow (Schmid, 2012, pp. 42-64) and take urban space to mean the built up environment that constitutes the place of material interaction and physical encounter, it is obvious that these real estate projects constitute a large part of Dubai's urban space. i.e. They constitute a significant parts of the city's "centres"..

This phenomenon is repeated to varying degrees across the Gulf cities where the IMREPs phenomenon has taken hold. To take another example that is not as well known as Dubai but it probably more extreme, we next turn our attention to Bahrain.



The above map presents an aerial view of the northern third of Bahrain, where more than three quarters of the total population (expatriates and citizens) live. Zone 3 represent iIMREPs that take the form of gated communities (where entrance and access is monitored), while Zone 2 represent international real estate in newly built urban high-rise areas that are commercial centers of the cities. Both are areas where freehold is allowed for non-citizens. Zone 4 represent the historic city centres of the capital Manama (to the left) and the second city of Muharraq, while Zone 1 signify residential areas, where only local (GCC) ownership of land is allowed and where the vast majority of citizens live. The dark line highlights the original shoreline of Bahrain before the reclamation of the sea over the past 4 decades.

Focusing particularly on the IMREPs in Bahrain (whether closed gate community in Zone 3 or urban high rise areas in Zone 2), it becomes obvious, that just like in the case of Dubai, they occupy a large chunk of the urban landscape and constitute many of its “centres”. They occupy some of the most valuable and central locations, being situated close to the historic cities of Manama and Muharraq and to the Northern sealine. They also constitute some of the most iconic buildings and the most expensive areas. Once again, regardless of the numbers inhabiting them, it is clear that these projects play a dominant role in defining the physical geographic landscape of Bahrain, which in turn interacts with and has repercussion on the demographic dynamics on the island.

Just as important as the emergence of these new “centres” in parallel to the older established areas is the urban segmentation witnessed between them. The appearance of new enclaves with different socio-economic functions and class of inhabitants points to a deepened parallelism between very different spheres, operating within a mixture of private-public zones of influence. Indeed, it is worthwhile asking whether it makes sense to take of multiple “centres” anymore, rather than congeries of parallel hubs, deepening existing socio-economic and regulatory segmentation and indeed in many cases creating new ones.

Although no concrete data exists on the distribution of people according to specific areas in Bahrain , first hand observation and field visits reveal quite strong and undisputed characteristics regarding the geographic habitation of the island: IMREPs (those that have already been completed) are mostly populated by well to do expatriates, with a few of these projects also separately catering to affluent citizens too.[17] This corresponds to the numbers detailed above for one of these projects (see p. 5). The same applies to the newer urban high rise areas, which are either composed of commercial spaces or residential apartments whose occupants (but not necessarily owners) are overwhelmingly expatriates. All of these areas have been built on reclaimed land. Historic areas, highlighted in zone 4, are increasingly also nearly completely composed of expatriates, but of the lower to mid-income class, as locals have

[17] E.g. Phase 1 of Durrat Al Bahrain is almost exclusively owned by GCC citizens.

increasingly vacated these areas. Nationals are almost exclusively housed within the suburban areas (zone 1), with some expatriates also renting and living in such areas.

What is striking is that the physical geography of the city is nearly completely determined and segmented based on two criteria: citizenship and economic class. Expatriates of upper income status are housed in the mega real estate projects, those of upper to mid income in the newer urban high rise areas, while those of mid to lower income are housed in the historic city centers (increasingly vacated by nationals). Finally, some "labourers", those that work in the construction business and factories, are housed in labour camps far away from the city centres, and which barely register in the above map. Locals on the other hand, live almost exclusively within the suburban areas (zone 1), where also expatriate domestic workers live in the same houses.

This phenomenon is not unique to Bahrain, and indeed is replicated and much more accentuated in the other cities where such real estate projects have been witnessed (Abu Dhabi, Doha, Dubai, and Muscat). Increasingly, living areas are segmented, with each class and citizen group living within their own area, with interaction mainly occurring in the urban high rise areas and historic city centres, when individuals attend work or go shopping.

Talk of expatriates in the Gulf typically conjures up images of construction workers in overcrowded labour camps. This is certainly one (ugly) side to the situation of expatriates in the region. It is indeed worth noting the extreme poles that expatriates occupy geographically, ranging from the most squalid conditions in labour camps, right to those living in the most defining places of luxury, opulence, and mass consumerism in the Gulf that are found in IMREPs. Although many more numbers of expatriates experience the former living headquarters, it is the latter that occupy "the centres" of the urban space and have a much more disproportionate impact on the physical landscape of the cities under consideration.

This brings us to the second important point on the conception of the derooted city. To have any viability, these international projects have to be geared towards expatriates. Within the local population alone, these "international" projects simply have no use value, and consequently cannot generate an exchange value. In other words, without an expatriate population to live in them, they ultimately have no end user or purpose and would end up being worthless in the long run. A new non-local population is needed, that could generate a use-value from inhabiting such cities, thus creating an exchange value and a trading price for these real estate units.

There is a catch, however. Although these "international projects" are geared and marketed towards expatriates, permanent integration and settlement within these countries is still ultimately not allowed, whether for holders of real estate or expatriate workers. Although the four countries under consideration have enacted legislation that allows for property ownership, and linked such property ownership with renewable residency visas, and indeed embarked on an unprecedented marketing campaign to attract international buyers to these projects, the fact remains, however, that no state explicitly allows for the integration of expatriate individuals into society on a permanent basis. Indeed, as X from South Africa put it when asked what would be the best incentive to generate demand for these real estate projects "At the end of the day you can never belong here, no matter how long you stay. You feel like it can never be your home, and that there is always somewhere else you must go back to. We are not even allowed to work in the region. "

This by all means is a curious combination, where a state and a significant proportion of its politically and economically influential class focuses such a huge part of its resources and energy on building projects that its current demographic base is unable to support, thus needing a new population base to inhabit and buy units in such projects, while also explicitly preventing them from integrating permanently.

This phenomenon has strong resonance with what has come to be seen in the literature as the commodification of the city, a process by which the urban space and the city itself becomes a commodity and is thus systematically exploited simply to generate exchange value. In the words of Schmid (p.55):

"This process encompasses not only the sale of parcels of land, and the reservation of exclusive locations for certain population groups. At stake, more generally, is the process by which urban space as such is exploited. The entire space is sold – including the people living in it, as well as the social resources and the economic effects produced by them…The people, residents and visitors alike, are reduced to mere "extras" in the great urban spectacle." (Schmid, 2012, p. 55).

Rem KoolHaas famously expounded the idea of the "generic city" in his 1995 essay with the same name (Koolhaas and Mau, 1995). For Koolhaas, the "generic city" is one which sheds its identity and history, which relieves itself with the obsession with the "historical centre". It is multiracial and multicultural, and it is based on people always on the move, global nomads with few local loyalties. Its most defining structure is the airport, a concentrate of the hyper-local and the hyper-global, and around which the activities of the city is concentrated. The "in-transit" condition is the norm. Supremely inorganic and planned, the city is populated by skyscrapers and highways built specifically for cars, that connect its diverse buildings in an aesthetic that can be best described as "freestyle".

Although such a description has strong resonance in the Gulf, it does not adequately describe the unique situation that lies at the heart of its cities. I prefer to use the term derooted hubs, where the majority of agents that animate these cities are not allowed to establish roots. Derooted here does not refer to the fact that these individuals have no historical roots in the city, or that they spend a relatively short time in the city before moving on (transient), although both can and probably are true for the majority of the cities' inhabitants. It instead refers to the fact that they are not allowed *de jure* to settle in the city permanently and establish roots. Their presence in the country is always precarious, always conditioned, and can never be made permanent. They are in a state of permanent temporariness. Integration and settlement is simply not an option. They are present as transient agents in the grander scheme of the commodification of urban space as an object of exchange value, explicitly prevented by law from establishing any permanent roots within the commodified urban space[18].

5. Power relations and the right to the city

What does derooted urbanism that is dominated by these IMREPs mean for the unfolding dynamics between state, business, citizens and expatriates? I would like to end this chapter by looking at the power relationships unfolding between these divergent groups, and offer a tentative outlook for the future. My main assertion is that such derooted hubs have an inherent

[18] The flip side of this has been the construction of an historical "Gulf image" – with 'folk' museums and 'traditional' housing aimed at attracting tourists and locals alike.

instability at their core, and that ultimately they are untenable in their pure envisioned form. There are two sources for this inherent disequilibrium. First is the instability in the proposition of trying to incentivize expatriates to rent, buy and live in such cities, while at the same time excluding outright the possibility of permanent settlement and integration. The second, and equally important factor, relates to a group that already has a legal right to establish roots, settle permanently and integrate in the city: citizens.

Let us begin with the second point. Historically, labour migrants to the region were a source of rent either for businesses or citizens. Expatriates who buy in IMREPs, on the other hand, are only a source of rent for the businesses who sell the real estate, as well a source of consumption for local retail outlets. They, however, have very little shared interests in common with the rest of citizenry. The lack of a common form of nationalism is compounded by the lack of any form of common material interests. In fact, they are increasingly a source of competition, both on resources (land, utilities and infra structure) and in being a key constituency whose needs and desires have to be taken into account by both the state and local business. Thus, questions over distribution and access to resources and privileges, and consequently questions regarding being at the centre vs. periphery of the city, will increasingly become important issues.

These tensions have already started surfacing. Nationals are outnumbered by expatriates in four out of the six GCC countries, and very frequently form a small minority of the inhabitants of many cities. They increasingly live in specific quarters that have often become tangential and peripheral to the overall dynamic within the city. A discourse of a general sense of alienation and discord with their urban surrounding is increasing, with talk of a demographic "tsunami" becoming louder.[19] Issues of the erosion of the Arabic language, preserving local culture, and the rise of the so-called chicken nuggets or "nido generation"[20] have become hotly debated topics within national circles.

In essence, by the end of the first decade of the 21st century, there was a growing perception amongst citizens that they are marginalized from the overall dynamics of the city. They are not

[19] e.g. the comments of the former Bahraini labour minister on a demographic tsunami ((Al Alawi, 2011).

[20] Local youths who, although having spent the majority of their lives in their own country, nevertheless speak English as a first language and present strong identification with "Western" culture.

important productively, increasingly less influential as consumers, and form a minority within these cities. Hence, they increasingly find themselves at the periphery of urban dynamics.

It is beyond doubt that ultimate power in the GCC, whether economic, security, or political, is still largely dominated by local rulers and the state apparatus they control. The state still plays the role of the omnipresent decider and arbitrator within society. Its actions, however, are increasingly constrained by having to take into account the different constituencies that it needs to cater to. An increasingly important but often neglected constituency is expatriates. This takes us to our second point, regarding the inherent instability in the concept of dertooted urbanism that is held as a guiding vision for these cities.

Let us take a quick summary view of the trajectory of events over the first decade of the 21st century: Faced with an over-supply of capital, the state and the private sector of the four GCC countries under consideration embarked on a programme of building new real estate projects of vast proportions. For these new cities to have a use-value and hence be a source of exchange value, it entails the need to import a whole new population to inhabit these new cities, as nationals neither have the numbers or the interest to live in such cities. Hence, these countries have embarked on a series of legislative and administrative reforms to attract such new investors and inhabitants to the region, including offering the right to buy real estate and tying this right to long term residency.

This is quite a development in countries that barely a decade ago refused flat out to sell any real estate to foreigners, ensuring a steady stream of income rent to property owners and not allowing permanent settlement that would create competition on benefits and resources with locals, in addition to deterring any perceived “security” concerns. However, it seems that decision makers in the GCC countries – and with different gradations between them - were still keen to limit and avoid any sort of political power that might be entailed by such ownership, and were certainly not yet considering permanent integration. Abu Dhabi, for example, has limited land transactions involving foreigners to 99-year leases and “Musataha” deals, where investors are able to buy the built-up area of a building but not the land beneath it. Bahrain on the other hand, has allowed freehold ownership and went the extra mile in allowing property holders since 2006 to vote in its municipality elections. This illustrates the inherent tension that lies at the heart of the derooted urbanism vision to create a hub society populated by people who are expected to work, consume and indeed live, but who are not allowed to permanently settle or integrate.

It became increasingly obvious that for the IMREPs to have any viability, the state was under growing pressure to offer further incentives and to cater for inhabitants of such cities. Otherwise there a real danger emerges that the huge amounts of invested capital will turn into ghost towns of incomplete and abandoned projects, with significant repercussion on international debts and claims outstanding from such projects, which number in the tens of billions of dollars. For example, the UAE announced in 2011 the extensions of residency visas associated with ownership of real estate from 6 months to 3 years in order resuscitate sagging demand in the aftermath of the financial crisis (John, 2011). Furthermore, an escrow law was passed to regulate the amounts of money going into projects that are yet to be completed. A strata law was further enacted, and RERA, the real estate regulating authority, was set up to regulate the sector in 2007 (Dubai Land Department, 2007). Hence, a significant investment has been made not only in terms of money and infrastructure but also in terms of laws and institutions put in place for IMREPs. In Bahrain, and in light of the political ramifications of the "February14" movement, expatriates officially demanded inclusion in the appointed legislative "Shura" council, as well as in the Chamber of commerce (Al-Wasat, 2011). Such demands for greater participation are likely to increase with time.

Hence it seems that that the ideal of derooted hubs is increasingly unstable, with the dynamics of capital, migration, politics of the state and international considerations all possibly playing an increasingly important role in how such a vision unfolds. Legislation, as we saw, is extremely vague in the case of IMREPS, with local laws not keeping up with the advent of such projects, raising important issues around sovereignty. There is considerable uncertainty over the laws applicable in disputes with regards to the roads and public ways in such projects. Are they the property of the developers, as the developers stipulate in their contracts, or are they commonly owned by the tenants, as the latter would like to claim based on similar laws applicable elsewhere in the world, or are they the property of the state? Most of the contracts involved in these real estate projects are based on international law, particularly English common law, whereas the local law was yet to be developed enough to deal with such issues.[21]

Such sovereignty and judicial issues have indeed started surfacing in the aftermath of the financial crisis. For example, Arcapita, a Bahrain-based investment banks with considerable involvement in some of the biggest real estate projects in Bahrain and beyond, filed in 2012 for Chapter 11 bankruptcy under US law, raising questions regarding the claims of ownership over such projects. Given that many of the main lenders and financiers of these projects are international financial institutions, the dictates of international capital have also increasingly entered into the equation.

Thus, the question that will be of ultimate importance in the GCC, to use an often abused term from Lefebvre, is who has " the right to the city"? This, as Mark Purcell succinctly point out (Purcell, 2002), involves issues of scalability and identity. Increasingly, there is competition over space between expatriates, citizens, business and the state. In terms of scale, questions arise around the scope of parties and agents who should be involved in the shaping of the urban space and the usage of resources. In terms of identity, the fact that there is such a marked distinction in terms of the use of space based on nationality certainly has social and political ramifications. Furthermore, it increasingly becomes obvious that expatriates, just as in the case of citizens, cannot be treated as one cohesive block. It is unlikely, for example, that real estate-owning expatriates of the upper middle have similar interests as the construction workers who build their properties.

6. The right to the city in Bahrain

Questions of class, space, resource usage, nationalities and the diverse discourses emerging around these issues make for an extremely complex landscape within the cities of the GCC. Events in Bahrain give a pertinent example. Much ink has been spilled on events in Bahrain since the explosion of 14 February 2011, but very little has been written on the role of IMREPs and the changing urban and demographic landscape within the ensuing events, although such

[21] Interview with Dr. Hassan Radhi, leading corporate lawyer in Bahrain, 15 December 2011.

factors had an extremely important role to play[22].

Between 2000-2010, more than fifty kilometres of sea (or nearly 10% of the country's landmass) has been reconstituted into reclaimed land. Most of the reclaimed land, mainly located on prime real estate property by the northern shore, has been allocated to creating new IMREPs. By 2008 there were more than 20 of these mega projects that have been or were being built in Bahrain, with the aim to create more than 60,000 new residential units with corresponding commercial and office spaces (DTZ, 2008).

On the demographic front, Bahrain has faced a unique issue centering on what has become known as political naturalization. Since the middle of the twentieth century, and increasingly in the first decade of the 21st century, the opposition in Bahrain has accused the government of fast tracking the arrival of carefully selected foreigners in order to change the demographic makeup of the country for political purposes. Citizens regularly complain that such groups were given houses and other benefits that are already in severe shortage. There are no official numbers on the extent of political naturalization, with the only existing estimate putting the number at 62,000 between the years 2001-2007 (Marzooq, 2011), or approximately 15% of the citizen population (for more, see Kanwal's chapter in this book).

These two issues, political naturalization and the land appropriated for mega real estate projects, were the two major political points of contentions in the country in the run-up to February 2011, in addition to grievances surrounding the structure of the local political system. A strong grassroots movement developed around these two issues that cut across citizen groups and threatened to build a national opposition to the government on common, non-sectarian grounds.

When the political situation exploded on 14 February 2011, the issues played a vitally important role in the opposition's discourse. The importance of the "appropriated public land" discourse was exemplified when Sh. Ali Salman, the head of the opposition society Al Wefaq, held up a deed in a press conference showing that the land for the Financial harbor, a flagship IMREP, was sold to the prime minister for 1 BD (2.5 US dollars). Protestors subsequently held up 1 BD notes

[22] I have written a more detailed study on Bahrain's spatial and demographic changes in (AlShehabi, 2014).

in demonstrations to highlight the issue (Al Hussaini, 2011).

The importance of the role of the demographic currents surfaced from the first day, when graphic videos of the attacks by security forces against protestors showed actions that involved some foreign or politically naturalized security forces. They would reappear once again when fights allegedly broke out between Shia locals and their naturalised counterparts at schools (Al Slaise, 2011). Scuffles also allegedly occurred between local and politically naturalized youth in a suburban town of mixed composition, Hamad Town, leaving several injured (Reuters, 2011).

Some expatriates on the island were also involved in the ensuing events. Groups of expatriates have attended pro-regime demonstrations, whether willingly or not, helping to swell the size of the demonstrations. There have also been reports of attacks on working class expatriates in Manama by anti-government demonstrators (BBC News, 2011). The main local English newspaper, The Gulf Daily News, also carried several comments and letters by expatriates showing their frustration with the anti-government demonstrators and highlighting support for the government. Indeed, the state actively used expatriates as a weapon for popular legitimacy. For example, when the Bahraini Doctors' Society was perceived to be under the influence of figures sympathetic to the opposition, the ministry of social affairs decreed that expatriate doctors should be allowed to register in the society and vote in the elections of its management board, hence more than doubling the society's membership and ensuring that a board sympathetic to the government was elected (Abdulla, 2012). Representatives of the diverse expatriate communities were also included in the government-sanctioned National Accord Talks, where they officially demanded inclusion in the appointed legislative "Shura" council, as well as in the Chamber of commerce. The secretary-general of the "Federation of Expatriate Associations", a largely pro-government organization of expatriates that regularly comments on political developments in the country, caused a storm in 2012 when she commented that "we make up 51 percent of the population", and "the majority do not support terrorism, but they end up victims of it." (AlGhatta, 2013).

On the other side, holding protests in the historic city of Manama has become a primary goal of the opposition, with weekly attempts at occupying the narrow alleyways of the city which are usually violently dispersed by the police force (Reuters, 2012). These protests are never sanctioned by the regime, which instead prefers to give official authorization for protests in villages far way from the central districts of the capital. A contest over the use of urban space has arisen. As previously mentioned, the historic centre of Manama has been largely deserted by locals by the beginning of the new millenium, becoming instead mainly inhabited by low to middle income expatriates. The insistence of parts of the opposition to hold demonstrations in these quarters is an attempt to reclaim the urban space of these historical cities and to impose their presence in the "centre" of the city. The government, of course, would prefer that they remain in the periphery of the urban space, away from the most strategic urban locations.

At the time of writing this chapter, the developments in Bahrain were still in a state of flux, but events there already showed that the power relations and the discourses surrounding the "right to the city" in the GCC are not a straightforward manner, with the interplay between expatriates, citizens, the state and even groups within and across such categories making for a constantly evolving and dynamic environment. Issues of the centre and the periphery are already being discussed, raising questions on who has the access to the increasingly scarcer resources of the region and "the right to the city".

7. **Conclusion: Rethinking migration and the city in the Gulf**

Migration in the Gulf has traditionally been analyzed in academic circles through the lens of labour, with the discourse usually focusing on the "structural violence" that expatriates experience in the region, particularly under the vagaries of the "Kafala" system. This is further augmented by a burgeoning literature on the "transnational" character of migration and the associated network of middlemen, family members, remit paths, and support networks that characterizes such migration. Our hope in this chapter was to provide a first attempt at analyzing the presence of expatriates in the region within a wider geographic framework, one that looked at the urban dynamics that transcend labour relations.

As an important development, we focused our discussion particularly on the phenomenon of "international mega- real estate projects" (IMPREPs). An examination of the spatial manifestation of these mega real estate projects necessarily entails seeing expatriates as more than simply a productive source of manpower, but should instead be seen as people with diverse lives and actions, who increasingly are a source of consumption, purchasing power, and part of the production and usage of the urban space in the GCC's cities. We have used the term "agents that animate the city" to describe the multiple interactions and socio-economic relations that people, whether expatriates or citizens, play within the city, including being consumers, producers and inhabitants.

We then argued that there are two features that make such IMREPS in the GCC unique. The first was that they increasingly have come to constitute new urban "centres" and enclaves in increasingly segmented city spaces. Furthermore, we contend that one of the defining "ideals" of this new phase of urban reality is its derooted urbanism vision, where the primary intended targets of this urban expansion- expatriates- are encouraged to come to the region, while explicitly being denied the possibility to permanently settle or integrate within. This creates an inherent instability and tension, both vis-à-vis expatriates and with respects to citizens. Increasingly, "the right to city" and the power relations arising within and between the different social groups will play an important role in the dynamics within the cities of the GCC.

A critical urban view of the cities of the GCC opens up more questions than it answers. For example, how is one to approach the spatial interactions between the historic city centers (increasingly inhabited exclusively by expatriates), the mega real estate projects, the suburban areas inhabited by nationals, and the labor camps for migrants in unskilled jobs? Taking a more international view, what are the different circuits and networks of capital and individuals – both local and international- that the different groups of expatriates with interests in the region (e.g. those who own real estate), are able to utilize and tap into? The increasing importance of international capital in the GCC, particularly in IMREPS, will also necessarily imply an trans-national dimension to the question, particularly with regards to the ramifications of the financial crisis and legal complexities involved in the cancellation of many of these real estate projects. Such issues highlight the importance of a critical examination of the urban geography in the GCC with respect to migration, one which we hope that we have been able to shed an initial light upon in this chapter.

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