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Culture in the ‘Politics of Identity’

Conceptions of national identity and citizenship among second generation non-Gulf Arab migrants in Dubai

Abstract

Based on a year long ethnographic study in Dubai, this article explores the following: How do second-generation Arab migrants articulate and negotiate the legal and social boundaries they are subjected to? I take into consideration the relative cultural proximity this group have to Emirati citizens, as well as the growing anti-Muslim and Arab sentiments in the West, and how these may implicate their experiences and narrations of citizenship and national identity. The majority of respondents did not wish to attempt to emulate ‘Emiratiness’, not only because of their lived experiences of exclusion from the Emirati community, but also because they saw a degree of dissonance between their lifestyles and cultural identities and that of Emiratis. While each participant had a distinct notion of what their ‘Arab culture and traditions’ meant, the umbrella of ‘Arabness’ which typifies the UAE was seen as preferable to the increasingly racialized and exclusionary forms of governance enacted within the West. A central paradox emerged when some second-generation migrants claimed a shared culture to the Emirati community and performed Emiratiness. This was on the basis of their historical and cultural ties to the region and, more importantly, their family connections with the Emirati community.

Key words: Second generation; Arab migrants; national identity; culture; citizenship; Dubai, United Arab Emirates, migrant integration

Introduction

The Gulf has witnessed an influx of migrants since the oil boom in the 1970s, to such an extent that today migrants make up 90 per cent of the country’s population in countries such as the United Arab

Emirates (UAE) and Qatar (Ahmad, 2012:1). In spite of the strict migration regimes that prevent permanent settlement and naturalisation, migrants have, for decades, made the Gulf their unofficial home, something that has led to the existence of second and third generation migrants who are born in these countries. However, the lived experiences of the migrants and their descendants have been conspicuous by their absence from the contemporary Western literature of migration, citizenship, diaspora and second generation. Scholars suggest that very little is known about middle class migrants and their descendants in this context because they are considered neither diasporic nor transnational due to legal and social policies that position these migrants as temporary and economic (Gardner, 2010; Fargues, 2011, p.274; Vora, 2013).

Limited yet growing literature on the lived experiences of migrants in the Gulf States, focus on the effects of structural exclusions of migrants from host societies on their understandings of belonging and identity, such as the absence of naturalisation and long term residencies (see Longva, 2005; Vora, 2013; Ali, 2011; Gardner, 2011), a highly nationalised schooling system (see Vora, 2013) and a workforce that is highly segmented on national, ethnic and racial lines (see Kapiszewski, 2001, Nagy, 2006; Walsh, 2010). Some of these scholars, challenging the conceptions of identity and belonging as based in liberal notions of rights, citizenship and cultural assimilation, investigated how migrants protected themselves against the systematic vulnerability of their temporariness in the Gulf, utilizing their privileged socio-economic locations (see Vora, 2013 for Indian diasporic elite; Kanna, 2011 for middle class South Asians in Dubai).

Moreover, the existing Gulf literature on migrant lives predominantly focus on the experiences of South Asian communities, since they constitute the largest population in the Gulf. Arab migrant communities and their children, despite outdating the more recent and rather temporary migrant flows to Gulf from South Asia and Western Europe, are virtually absent from Gulf scholarship (Babar, 2014, p.1-3). Their experiences require close attention, because their cultural proximity to the Gulf States have historically created a sense of social and political threat among the authorities for these communities' perceived ability to affect the boundaries of the nation (Kapiszewski, 2001; Fargues, 2011; Babar, 2014; Manal, 2015; Chalcraft, 2010).

Non-Gulf Arab migrant groups comprised up to 75 percent of the foreign workforce by the 1970s, whereas today they constitute less than 25 percent of the Gulf populations (Babar, 2014, p.3). Pan-Arabism, a political ideology that spread to the Arab Gulf region by Arab migrant workers during the 1950s and 1960s, also shaped the perception of local Gulf populations

towards Arab migrant groups favorably (Chalcraft, 2010, p.13). Arab migrants were welcomed as ‘brothers’, and local groups pressed for better rights for these groups (Chalcraft, 2010, p.8). The growing support by local populations for Arab nationalism, threatened the political legitimacy of Gulf rulers, who in turn, systematically reduced the number of Arab workers and recruited a predominantly South Asian migrant workforce (Chalcraft, 2010; Jamal, 2015). The idea behind the diversification of migrant populations in the Gulf had been to decrease the chances of community formation and political activation among dominant groups in society (Jamal, 2015; Kanna, 2011).

Drawing on the findings of my doctoral research in Dubai between 2015 and 2016, this article explores how the cultural identities (ethnicity, language, and religion) of non-Gulf Arab second generation migrants in Dubai, are implicated in the diverse ways that they articulate legal and social boundaries that exist between them and their host society, and, consequently, their imaginations of the ‘Emirati nation’. In understanding how respondents shape their belonging to the UAE, this paper also takes into consideration the impact of growing anti-Muslim and Arab sentiments and increasing immigration restrictions in Western countries (i.e. President Trump’s executive order on blocking citizens of six predominantly Muslim countries from entering the United States). Whilst acknowledging the importance of access to citizenship in the way boundaries are experienced by migrant groups, I argue that, these boundaries are not fixed and are experienced differently based on individuals’ migration trajectories, their historical and cultural affiliations with the host community as well as changing political and social climate. By showing similar processes of boundary making, I try and draw closer connections between the migrant lives in the Gulf States and the wider migration studies literature. This is important to do so as the former is often regarded as a sociologically exceptional region due to the absence of citizenship access for migrants and the latter is historically shaped by the experiences of migrant communities in traditional immigration countries in the ‘West’.

Theoretical Framework

The traditional immigration countries which produced the literature on second generation historically focused on issues of integration or assimilation and public policies for a better incorporation of second generation. The second generation migrants’ identity is often analysed within the context of trans-nationalism and diaspora (Vertovec, 1999; Gilroy, 1997; Hall, 1990) as a result of these communities putting their roots elsewhere and their descendants being born

and raised in host societies (Brah, 1996). The literature discussed widely, how access to citizenship rights, and acquiring social and cultural skills through education, friendships and language enabled a 'better integration' of second generation to their host societies, when compared to their parents (Alba, 2005).

There are two main reasons that require a reframing in the way we understand and study the second generation in the GCC. First, explaining second generation identities only through their social and cultural integration to host society ignores how broader social and power relations as well as structures of class, gender, race and ethnicity or other markers of differentiation in the country of settlement play a role in the identity process (Brah, 1996: 182, Anthias, 2002). In order to understand how migrant groups are placed within the social and power relations as well as structural and institutional practices (Vertovec, 2001), we need to analyse diasporas in its context (Brah, 1996:182). Second, in relation to the first point, the 'de facto' and 'de jure' separation between citizens and migrants in the Gulf States (Fargues, 2011), suggest that there are no concern for migrants' integration to the national communities, for they are perceived to pose a threat to the national cultural homogeneity (Vora, 2013). This is in contrast to the majority of traditional immigration receiving countries in the West, where immigration is integral to the public policy. As a result, identities in Dubai are argued to be constructed against each other, migrants versus citizens, (Ticku, 2010), rather than through cultural and social interactions.

Considering the limitations of applying the second generation literature from the 'West' to the experiences of the group I study, I use theories of boundary making (Barth, 1969; Yang, 2000) and performing (Edensor, 2002; Butler, 1993) in investigating how inclusions to and exclusions from the nation are imagined and negotiated, and how the decision making processes surrounding the 'boundary line of the nation' are articulated (Skey, 2013:92; Yuval-Davis, 2011). I argue that like any other type of identity, national and cultural identity, imply both sameness, authenticity and a degree of difference from others. Determining in/exclusions into a group, society or national identity, functions within a structure of power in which dominant group members can construct, maintain and/or rework the boundaries of belonging. In order to understand the boundary lines of an ethnic or national group, we need to consider the larger historical and structural context as well as the political and economic interests that determine it (Yang, 2000).

While I argue that the nation-state is central in constructing these boundaries formally, for example through access to citizenship, boundaries are also shaped informally, for example based on perceptions of difference (Skey, 2013). It is the boundary line of the nation where people understand ‘who they are (not) or ought (not) to be’ (Yuval-Davis, 2011). That being said, I also acknowledge the role of performance in (re)producing and consolidating identities, achieved through ‘incorporating rituals’ by individuals (Butler, 1993; Edensor, 2002). In this sense, performance is used as a search for commonality with citizens as well as a differentiation from them, i.e. as a tool of negotiating boundaries and marking difference.

Methodology

My doctoral research investigated the experiences of national identity and citizenship in Dubai both among citizens and non-citizens. Out of a total 56 interviews, 20 of them were with second generation non-Gulf Arab migrants. Aged between 25 to 34, they were all born and raised in the UAE. Parents of my informants have arrived in the UAE from mid/late sixties to early eighties. Only a two of them have worked in the Gulf earlier (Kuwait and Bahrain), while for others UAE was the first country they migrated. They originated from countries in the Middle East (4 Syrians, 1 Iraqi, 1 Lebanese, 1 Jordanian, 3 Palestinian-Jordanian); North Africa (3 Sudanese and 3 Egyptian); East Africa (1 Somalian and 1 Zanzibari) and the Persian side of the Gulf (2 Iranian). With the exception of two Sudanese informants, those who arrived from Middle East and Africa worked in highly skilled jobs, such as judges, teachers, engineers, bankers, doctors, and were educated to university level. The rest of them had taken up lesser skilled jobs, working in administrative and technical posts in the army, ports, municipality and local banks.

In recruiting informants, I used a snowballing technique, where I reached potential informants using my network of friends, colleagues and acquaintances (Bryman, 2008). Purposive sampling involved nationality, place of origin, socio-economic and their social proximity to the host society, as the main criteria of selection. The commonality among the sample stems from their ‘Arabness’, whether this was self-perceived or ascribed. Acknowledging the contested definitions of the term, this research does not dwell into its complexities and neither does it attempt to generalize respondents’ experiences and narratives based on a shared identity of ‘Arabness’. It rather shows the reader how ‘Arabness’ is used by respondents either in order to assert closer proximity to the Emirati community or distance and differentiate themselves from it.

Out of 20 informants, 8 were female and 12 were male. 4 informants were Christian, and the rest were Muslim (all Sunni, except one Shia denomination). One Jordanian participant held dual citizenship from Canada, while an Iraqi participant was an American citizen. Three of the participants (1 Sudanese, 1 Iranian and Zanzibari) had Emirati family members.

All the participants were by definition middle or upper-middle class, as there is a minimum income requirement for family reunification in the UAE (Ali, 2011). All of the participants are engaged in workforce, in skilled capacities and mostly within the private sector, with a few exceptions (six informants) who work in local banks, municipalities, schools and airports. Only three out of twenty informants were unable to attain higher education due to financial difficulties, while another chose not to attend university in order to take over family business.

With the exception of three (Somalian, Zanzibari, Iranian), all of my participants were educated in private schools, which also had Emirati students.¹ While these three participants did not school with Emiratis, they have spent substantial amount of time with them through their family and friendship links, as well as working and living in same spaces. As a result, they were fluent in Emirati Arabic, alongside with their native Swahili, Iranian and Somali. Apart from these informants, all participants spoke Arabic as their first language.

None of my participants had lived in their parents' countries of origin, while their visits varied depending on their countries' political situations. None of my participants and their families professed plans to return to their countries. In fact, 'return' was not a viable option for informants, with the exception of Jordanian passport holders. This is because in relative terms, Jordan is perceived as the most politically stable country and Jordanian passport as the most 'privileged'.

In order to contextualize my informants' narratives, I have started the interviews by asking them about their families' migration trajectories to the UAE, their childhood memories, the neighborhoods they grew up, their schooling experiences, their friendships, and work experiences. In order to reveal insights into how my participants articulate legal and social exclusions and discourses, I asked how they perceived their belonging in these societies both on legal and social terms, and whether their cultural background made a difference in the way they experienced everyday life and interactions with the local community. With these questions, I also explored their coping strategies with their

¹ Schooling in Arabic is provided free of charge by the government to all citizens, whereas non-citizens need to opt for a wide range of privatised education options, either nationality, faith-based schools or international schools teaching in Western curriculums (Vora, 2013, p.147).

‘temporary’ statuses in Dubai, their future plans, and Dubai’s place within.

I have used an inductive approach to analyze my data where I aimed to identify patterns, themes, and categories emerging from the field (Patton, 1980, p. 306). While theory and literature review enabled the interpretation of my empirical data, it did not determine my findings, more so, considering the limited literature on the experiences of national identity and citizenship among young Emirati citizens and second generation Arab migrants.

Findings & Discussion

Imagining the Emirati nation through citizenship

Official and popular discourses define Emirati national identity through citizenship, one that is premised on shared ancestry, kinship and descent among those who are in possession of Emirati passports: Bedouin, tribal and Arab. At the core of these widely pronounced narratives lie the idea that immigration to the United Arab Emirates is a post-oil phenomenon, which brought cultural, social, economic and political implications on the ‘homogenous native population’, who become numerically a minority in their own country. Thus, despite the ethnic, tribal and cultural differences within Emirati citizens, today the diversity in the UAE is solely attributed to migrants, who, through their legal and social exclusion from the national community, have become crucial to the construction and maintenance of Emirati citizenship and national identity (Vora, 2013; Kanna, 2011).

The official and popular discourses around Gulf national identity, inclusive of Emirati identity, is central to the ways in which these populations are imagined as homogenous and absolute, especially by outsiders. The large degree of social distance between national and migrant groups in Gulf societies and the discreteness of nationals about their origins, helps to cultivate and reproduce these widely held beliefs.

Despite sharing linguistic and cultural proximity to nationals and decades-long residency in the country, second generation Arab migrants’ conceptions of national identity and citizenship were very similar to those of official discourses and citizens, in the way they perceived themselves as outsiders.

Moreover, despite knowing the ethnic diversities within the citizenry, second generation Arab migrants did not imagine Emirati citizens as being culturally diverse. This is because they equated having Emirati citizenship to cultural belonging. An Iraqi participant, Sulaiman, who has close relations with Emiratis, illustrates this:

“By looking at Emiratis or talking to them, I can tell where they came from. But to be honest, I don’t care about that, no Emirati would tell you oh my origins are Iranian. They have been here a long time. It is something that they discuss or joke only amongst themselves. No expats would know these differentiations unless you are really inside their communities. As long as you hold the passport, you are Emirati to me”.

Sulaiman’s family has been in the UAE since the late 1960s, which is as long as some of the naturalized Emirati citizens. Yet, ironically, his imagining of Emiratis as a culturally homogenous group is based on their length of residence and their legal membership. These contradictory remarks are indicative of the weight of official governmental discourses on the way that outsiders understand the boundaries of the Emirati nation. In fact, it is non-citizen forms of belonging in the UAE that purifies national identity together with state projects of heritage, which reinforce the illusion of commonality among citizens (Vora, 2013; Longva, 2005).

Being subjected to legal and social exclusion did not mean, however, that my second-generation informants claimed no ‘deservingness’ to Emirati citizenship. The majority of my informants’ parents were officially invited to the UAE to introduce the country to key fields such as law, medicine, and engineering. Thus, in conversations related to naturalization, second-generation Arab migrants underscored both the modern-ness and advanced-ness of their families’ country of origin (see, Khalaf, 2005) as well as their parents’ contributions to building the nation and to its economic growth. Othman, a Jordanian participant whose father arrived in the UAE in the late 1960s to work as a judge, illustrates this:

“My father’s colleagues were Syrians, Egyptians, Iraqis and small numbers of Sudanese in Ministry of Justice. Our countries have been up and running long time before the UAE, so they invited us to help to set up laws, regulations etc. My mum taught English to Emiratis. Emiratis were intrigued with our mind-set, the way we spoke elegantly, the way we dressed in a Western style... They were very welcoming to us, wanted to be modern and international like us”.

These narratives were recurrent among informants, which resembled those of wealthy Indian gold merchants in the early days of the ‘Dubai boom’ (see Vora, 2013:34). Considering that power and social dynamics within the Emirati society have changed since their parents’ time of arrival, there was a conscious reference to an era when, in relation to the local community, their cultural identity was perceived as prestigious and the socio-economic positioning of their communities and countries of origin was privileged.

Influenced by their increasing links to the West and other parts of the Middle East, from the 1940s to the early federation days in the 1970s, many people in the Gulf have adopted Western clothing (Khalaf, 2005). Young Gulf citizens at that time saw the Western style of dressing as a signifier of modernization and of being educated and worldly, while wearing their traditional dresses was seen as something of the past that was destined to decline with modernization (Khalaf, 2005; Onley, 2005). Similarly, because of the infiltration of Persian, Baluchi and Urdu elements, Gulf Arabic was perceived by other Arabic speakers to be a form of ‘corrupted’ language, in comparison to long-standing sophisticated forms of Egyptian and Levant Arabic (Piller, 2017:9).

With the economic dominance of the Gulf region in comparison to other parts of the Arab World, the prestige of Emirati Arabic and national dress is enhanced, however. More importantly, these two elements have become the key markers of Emirati national identity (Khalaf, 2005; Onley, 2005). Not surprisingly, Emirati respondents were typically displeased by non-Emiratis who try to ‘pass as an Emirati’ either through speaking with an Emirati Arabic or wearing the Emirati national dress. Similarly, nearly all non-citizen respondents perceived such performances not credible and unrecognized by Emiratis. Alaa, a Palestinian-Jordanian participant tries to legitimize this argument through sharing with me what his Emirati friends think of such ‘performances’:

“I know Palestinians who choose to talk Emirati, wear kandoora, act like Emiratis. They have perfected the accent but they don’t look Emirati and Emiratis know that. Emiratis think they are trying to get the brownie points with them. They would be like: ‘he is doing his best to be like one of us but he is not.’ That is what I hear from my Emirati friends, in my presence. Even if I got the passport, I would never talk 100% Emirati or dress like one, all day everyday, because I’m just not Emirati”.

Not only does Alaa's statement shows how connotations attached to national dress have now changed from being old-fashioned and traditional to powerful and privileged but also how it became an important tool in the articulation of identity politics by second generation Arab migrants. Typically, the majority of respondents, similarly to Alaa, did not wish to attempt to 'pass as Emirati' because for them this was something that they would never truly become. The idea that emulating an Emirati identity will be unrecognized or displease Emiratis, prove that it is the dominant groups in society have the power to construct, maintain and/or rework the boundary lines of the nation (Yuval-Davis, 2011). Whilst performing a national identity can be a mean to negotiate the boundaries of a community and seek inclusion (Tufail and Poynting, 2013), in the UAE performing Emirateness was seen as crossing the boundaries of Emirati community by Gulf born young Arab migrants. As migrants are placed outside these boundaries both in legal and social terms, my respondents avoided 'passing as Emirati'.

Another recurrent narrative among the informants was the 'easiness' of the access to acquiring Emirati citizenship in the early years of the federation. While I cannot argue whether it is a reality or merely a narrative strategy, nearly all of my informants suggested that their parents were offered citizenship in the early years of the federations for their contributions to the UAE, yet they declined the offer on the basis of how 'underdeveloped' the UAE was and that they did not see a future in this country. In fact, many informants were resentful of their parents' choices. Hamzah, a Sudanese informant born and raised in Dubai, notes:

"Yes, we do deserve citizenship in my opinion but it will never happen. My dad was given a paper just to sign (through his sponsor) so he would get both the *jawaz* (passport) and *jinsiya* (citizenship), but he said no. This was back in the 80s, 90s. It was very easy to get it at that moment, even those who came after us got it, mainly Palestinians, because they knew the right people. Like many other Arabs (migrants), he never thought he would stay in the UAE, the country was just desert. My dad's *kafeel*, the local guy, says my dad is an idiot, in front of me. And from my heart I agree with him. Most of us had the chance, who has used his mind and got it, they succeeded. Those who ignored it and refused it, I can see how much they are suffering now".

While these statements show informants' claims to 'deservingness' and their continuing desire to acquire Emirati citizenship, the current socio-economic gap between their countries of origin and the UAE as well as political instability made my informants 'grateful' for the opportunities the UAE has offered them (see Babar, 2014, p.2). Moreover, second generation migrants were

also grateful for their advantaged position in the job market in relation to other ‘non-Western’ migrant groups, such as South Asians. This is because their linguistic and cultural proximities to the local population often enabled them to occupy higher income and skill levels (see Babar, 2014, for a similar argument in Qatar).

In addition to their economic contributions, second generation Arabs have also utilized the umbrella of Arabness and Islam which typifies the UAE, as well as their long-term residency in the country, in claiming more ‘deservingness’ than other groups. Even though they had a distinct notion of what their ‘Arab culture, values and traditions’ meant, considering the weight that ‘Arabness’ carries, not only in defining the Emirati citizenry but also claims to citizenship², they expressed a relative proximity for eligibility for naturalization.

“I support it (citizenship policy). Here there is a unique culture, Arab culture. If they give it to any nationality that lives here for few years, the land will lose their origin, who they are. Not to disrespect any race but what happens if an Indian or an Iranian comes and says I am Emirati? Emiratis are known to be Arabs, so you need to speak Arabic, Muslim, know the history, the people...and now country being very rich, and all the benefit citizens get, of course everyone wants to get a piece of that. I feel like I have more right to get the citizenship say in comparison to an English person, because I am 90% closer to this culture... Or if they give citizenship to non-Arabs, they shouldn’t give them all the benefits”. (Ashraf, Iranian passport holder who identifies as Arab)

As Ashraf states, conflating eligibility for naturalization and citizenship benefits with one’s ethnicity is a common narrative among both Emiratis and second generation Arab migrants. Even though both Arab migrant groups and Emirati nationals are highly diverse within their own communities, ‘Arabness’ as a collective, socio-cultural identity is instrumental for both groups, either in marking or negotiating the boundaries of the nation: for Arab migrants to claim more ‘deservingness’ and eligibility for citizenship than non-Arab migrants, and for Emiratis to restrict migrants from accessing citizenship on the basis of presumed ‘cultural homogeneity’ among citizens (see Yang, 2000: 46-47, on instrumental approaches to ethnicity).

² The citizenship law only considers Muslim Arabs and Arabic speakers, who have been in the UAE at least 30 years for naturalization (Ali, 2011).

Having said that, informants were aware that the pathway to naturalization was difficult for them, if not impossible, as Hamzah stated earlier. Thus, narratives like Ashraf's, despite being recurrent, were often followed by contradictory remarks. Despite their multigenerational existence in the UAE and their relative cultural proximity, second generation Arab migrants underlined the fact that there was no difference between them and any other migrant group, both in terms of their legal status and precarious future in the UAE and in the way the Emirati community perceived them. Ziad, a Syrian respondent, illustrates this point:

“Let me tell you something, there is no differences between me and a Filipino or Pakistani guy who gets a job and comes to Dubai today. If his visa gets cancelled or mine, we have to leave at the same time. They are not going to be like oh Ziad has been here all his life. I just would like something that proves that this is home, even permanent residency is fine. I am not after being recognized as Emirati because that would most likely not happen, because even if we become Emiratis, we won't be the original ones, we will be like second class, the immigrants. We are very rooted in our Levantine traditions and Emiratis in theirs... Isn't it the same for like Turks in Germany”?

As Ziad states, the majority of informants did not wish to attempt to emulate 'Emiratiness', not only because of their lived experiences of exclusion from the Emirati community, but also because they saw a degree of dissonance between their lifestyles and cultural identities and those of Emiratis. Therefore, Ziad and the majority of informants stated that they were indifferent to the recognition of their social membership to the Emirati community, as long as their permanency in the UAE was assured. In order to show that social and legal membership do not need to go hand in hand, he gives examples from Western societies, which reads as an internalization of legal and social stratifications within a society.

Ziad's statements were shared by the majority of respondents. Such narratives among the participants support the body of literature which argues that the rejection of *jus soli*, the law of birthplace, not only hinders social, political and cultural integration (Brubaker, 1992) but also feeds insecurities and non-belonging among second generation 'migrants', who as a result come to identify themselves primarily as members of racial, national, ethnic, or religious groups (Koopmans and Statham, 1999; Castles and Davidson, 2000; Isin and Wood, 2009)

Moreover, informants like Ziad may think that asking only for permanent residency and having no intention to perform Emiratinness may please the Emiratis, who perceive migrants as a social, cultural and economic threat to their communities. Therefore, by suggesting that they should be included only through permanent residency, in my participants' imaginations they are maintaining desired social boundaries between citizens and migrants while softening the legal ones. Having said that, the next section in this article will show how some second generation migrants, in contrast, claimed cultural belonging to the UAE and performed Emiratinness.

Last but not least, internalization of official citizenship policies by second generation Arab migrants is also related to political concerns. Many informants, similar to Emirati citizens, attributed social cohesion and political stability in the UAE to its strict naturalization policy, even though this system excluded people like them. These views stem from the fact that many of my informants originate from some of the most politically instable countries in the Middle East and North Africa. Moreover, the impact of growing anti-Muslim and Arab sentiments and increasing immigration restrictions in Western countries also drew them closer to the UAE. Moustafa, a Sudanese informant, illustrates this popular sentiment:

“If I am going to compare UAE with other countries, I can say from my side that I live in paradise. The safety, no terror... Look at all the issues Europe, maybe this is the reason why UAE keeps citizenship limited. Good luck being a Muslim in Europe now... We have family there but to be honest, even though I would like citizenship from there, I will come back to Dubai afterwards, where my culture is no issue. My family says this is not your country, but no this is my country! I won't do anything wrong to jeopardise my stay. I studied here, I was born here, I slept here, I ate here. 90% of the family is in Sudan yet I don't feel the same connection. Why should I have any allegiance to a country with full of corruption and no respect for citizens”?

Despite not having the benefits that citizens have, second generation migrants' sentiments were very similar to Emiratis in the way they equated having allegiances to a country with the opportunities it provided for them. Moreover, in comparison to increasingly racialized and exclusionary forms of governance enacted within the West, targeting communities similar to theirs, informants felt their religious commonality with the UAE enabled a 'cultural inclusion' and shielded them from being perceived as disloyal. Considering the global and regional turmoil, the UAE's positioning as the second safest country in the world is something both citizens and migrants do not want to compromise.

While for the vast majority of the respondents acquiring citizenship from a ‘Western’ country is still a priority, their future plans increasingly involve returning to the UAE, where they feel their cultural identity is not only unproblematic but also relatively privileged when compared to other non-Western migrant groups. This section illustrated that, while second generation Arab migrants cannot affect the boundaries of the nation, based on their national and cultural backgrounds they experience and articulate these boundaries differently, in comparison to other migrant groups.

Crossing the boundaries of the nation: ‘Quasi Emiratis’

The UAE makes no cultural demands from migrant communities except respect for cultural and Islamic values and morals in public. In fact, in order to preserve the ‘cultural homogeneity’ of its citizens and to prevent cultural threats migrants may pose to the national community, the state manages boundaries between these communities not only through the absence of naturalization (Longva, 2005; Vora, 2013; Ali, 2011) but also through a highly nationalized schooling system (Vora, 2013) and a workforce that is highly segmented according to national, ethnic and racial lines (Kapiszewski, 2001; Walsh, 2010).

When compared to other migrant groups, second-generation Arab migrants claimed to share more social spaces with Emiratis, such as schooling together in private schools or working in government offices. Yet, as I illustrated earlier, this did not result in a closer proximity between these groups, for they typically found Emiratis culturally distant and expressed their lack of interest in performing Emiratiness. A central paradox emerged, however, when four respondents (Iranian, Somalian, Sudanese and Zanzibari) claimed a shared culture with the Emirati community. Their arguments were based on their historical and cultural ties to the region and, more importantly, their intimate connections, which were enabled by family members who held UAE passports and friendships they had acquired with Emiratis since childhood. This group embodied the national dress as everyday wear, spoke with a distinctive Emirati dialect and identified closely with the culture and its customs. Even though ‘they felt Emirati’ and suggested that they did not need formal affirmation of belonging to the national community, they were reluctant to express this as they thought Emiratis would not entertain it.

Ashraf is one of these examples. I was introduced to him at a dinner party in Dubai hosted by a friend who said that he would be a great person to talk to for my research. He is a second-generation Iranian

born and raised in Dubai. His two uncles, who arrived in Dubai in the late 1960s, have received Emirati citizenship while Ashraf's family who arrived in the late 1970s, were unable to do so. Ashraf identifies as Arab, speaks the Emirati dialect of Arabic and wears *kandoora* (Emirati national dress) on a daily basis. When we were left alone, I told him that it would have been impossible for me to differentiate him from an Emirati. Upon hearing this, he pulled out his phone, smiling, and showed me an Instagram photo of himself wearing a blue *kandoora* entering a Ferrari. He told me that people not only think that he is Emirati but they also think that he comes from an influential family, especially since he started trimming his beard in an 'Emirati fashion'. When I complimented him on his *kandoora*, he says, "*Ya, this is what we wear in winter, darker clothes*". He went on to explain his roots:

"Where I am from in Iran is all Arabs, we are Arabs. But I don't want to say this openly and then being blamed for 'trying too hard to be Emirati'. But the older generation Emiratis know who we are. Once I was in Khor Fakkan, at an Emirati friend's house, when his father asked me where I am from. When I replied Qeshm, he said 'oh you are Arab; you are one of us'! I feel we are more Arabs; I mean more Arabs than Ajam. They have come from Southern Iran but we are an island that is so close to the UAE. Al Jismi, Al Zarouni, all these big Emirati families are from Qeshm".

Being from an island that is in close geographic, historic and cultural proximity to the Arabian shores of the Gulf and having Emirati family members were added benefits in Ashraf's claims to Emirateness. His performances of Emirateness were not solely to negotiate status and seek inclusion, but a natural consequence of being brought up in an Emirati-dominated social environment. Yet, he was still cautious about asserting himself as Arab and Emirati in Emirati environments because he felt that his belonging was not recognized, at least in formal terms. This shows that self-identifying as belonging, on its own, is not enough and needs to be "supplemented and recognized" by group members (Jones and Krzyanowski, 2008:49).

Hussain shared sentiments similar to Ashraf's. Both of Hussain's uncles hold Emirati passports, while his father and family have been waiting to receive their passports for the past 25 years. Hussain identifies as Emirati and is often identified as Emirati by others, based on his performances of Emirateness. Earlier in the chapter I illustrated how his surname, which is known in the region, meant that people 'mistake' him for an Emirati. Hussain suggests that his and his family's cultural affiliation with the Emirates matters more than 'the color of their passport', for all Emiratis think they are 'local':

“My children are 100% Emirati. They have never even been to Tanzania. So I took my oldest son there, I said listen man you have a Tanzanian passport so let’s go and see what it is like over there (laughs). All my children know how to do yola dance (traditional folk dance). When teacher asks in classroom, they are the first one to volunteer, even before the locals (he smiles proudly and shows me pictures from a national day celebration where his kids performed yola)”.

Similar to Hussain, Tamer, a second-generation Somali informant, can easily pass as an Emirati. He has two Emirati uncles and his family has been in the UAE since the mid-1970s. Tamer culturally identifies as Emirati as a result of his lived experiences. He tells me that many migrants try to pass as Emirati by simply ‘throwing on a *dishdasha*’. Yet, he differentiates himself from these groups and tells me that being Emirati is about knowing the rituals, history and culture of the UAE and even small things like ‘greeting one another by nose to nose kiss’. Both Hussain and Tamer told me that these cultural traits were acquired by hanging out with Emiratis all their lives and were not available to other migrants living in the UAE. Through their lived experiences and cultural assimilation, they sought to affect the boundaries of the nation differently from other migrant groups (Bell, 1999; Fortier, 2000). Moustafa, a Sudanese participant, shared similar sentiments to Ashraf, Hussain and Tamer, despite not having any Emirati family or historical roots to the UAE. Born and raised in Karama, next to a compound housing Dubai Army personnel, Moustafa grew up in close proximity with Emiratis and learned to speak with an Emirati accent. In our discussion, Moustafa told me how strongly attached he feels to the UAE, despite not being Emirati, and disagrees with his family who often remind him that this is not home and that he will eventually have to leave.

“For what this country has done for me, even if I give my soul it won’t be enough. If they make army service available to non-locals, I would do it. I am not same as any other expat, fresh off the boat. Officially I belong with the expat group but when it comes to social interactions, I am more towards the UAE society. I speak all the languages of Dubai. I would be much more preferred at work places because of this but also since I know how to deal with different nationalities based on my upbringing in a place like Karama. I know how to deal with an Indian, Bangladeshi, Pakistani or a local. I know how this system

works, how the city operates, have the right contacts to pull me out situations, I have the behavioural skills”.

As seen from Moustafa’s statement, national service is not only seen as a platform to express patriotism and loyalty to the state, but also a way to ‘pay back’ the Emirates, which Moustafa sees as home. These narratives of patriotism can also be seen as migrants, like Moustafa, trying to establish a dialogue with their host community and the collective identity of Emiratiness in which they aspire to be included (see Landi, 2000).

Moustafa, despite being a high-school dropout, now holds a managerial position in one of the international banks. He owes his success to the social and cultural capital (his Emirati appearance, accent and connections) he has managed to accumulate in the UAE, which were perceived as ‘priceless’ in the eyes of his employers. He provided me with another example of how his close proximity to the local culture had helped him out of situations. One night, he and his friends were hanging out in their neighbourhood and were falsely taken by the police for interrogation relating to a reported burglary. As Moustafa tried to explain the situation, the police mistook Moustafa as being Emirati because of his demeanour and his accent. The officer only realised that Moustafa was not Emirati when he has handed over his identification. The police officer was equally surprised to hear Moustafa speaking both in Urdu and Farsi with his friends, languages in which many Emiratis, especially older generation, are able to converse. As the situation was cleared, Moustafa told me proudly what the police officer said to him and his friends:

“You are Emirati to me, you are the children of this country”.

The statements by this group suggested that their performances of Emiratiness were a natural consequence of their upbringing in close proximity to the national community, which has become part of their social habit memory (Edensor, 2002). This shows that while in general essentialised forms of identities are more common in the UAE, non-citizens can learn to perform Emiratiness and achieve a degree of competence based on their personal connection to the place and people (Goffman, 1999). This in turn has the potential to blur the boundaries between migrants and citizens and complicate the official and popular equation of citizenship (as legal membership) to national identity (cultural belonging) in the Emirates. Having said that, whilst ‘quasi Emiratis’ often differentiated themselves from other expats and even from other second-generation migrants in claiming stronger belonging to

the national community, they shared the same insecurities as the rest of my second-generation respondents in the way they were worried about their future in the UAE. This was simply a result of being subjected to same legal structures that did not allow permanency.

Conclusion

Official and popular definitions of the Emirati nation have been central in the way second generation Arab migrants imagined the nation and evaluated in/exclusions to it. By officially defining national identity through citizenship and declaring it as Arab and Islamic-, these narratives have transformed existing assumptions about what constitutes Arabness (Longva, 2006; Limbert, 2014: 595). As a result, not only an ethnized but also a racialized notion of Arabness has been shaped and consolidated in the broader Arabian Peninsula (Limbert, 2014:590). Based on qualitative research, this article has illustrated how Arabness in Dubai specifically is (re)produced, and how boundaries between migrant and citizen groups are reinforced, through everyday performances of different types of Arabness among migrant and citizen communities.

Inspired by boundary making theories (Barth, 1969; Wimmer, 2008; Yang, 2000), I have demonstrated that the exclusion of migrants from citizenship and national identity, together with state projects of heritage and tradition invention of the Gulf States, have become integral to the boundary construction and maintenance between migrant and citizen populations. I argued that, due to sharing 'Arabness' as an identity, boundaries between Arab migrants and Emirati citizens were became increasingly salient. Taking into consideration the larger historical context, where Arab communities' relevant cultural proximity to the local populations were perceived as a social and political threat by the Gulf States (Chalcraft, 2010), I argued that boundaries and identities are also shaped in response to political and social events. Even though second generation Arab migrants share more social spaces with Emiratis than other migrants, it was through this socialising that they established cultural boundaries to mark out their differences in 'Arabness', as opposed to forming closer cultural and social proximity to one another.

While official and popular discourses are central in demarcating the boundaries between migrant and citizen populations, they cannot fully control the way people affect these boundaries based on their individual experiences (Yuval-Davis, 2011). I illustrated this, firstly, by showing how some second-generation migrants, some of whom are not Arab, claimed a similar culture to the Emirati community and performed Emiratiness on an everyday basis. Secondly, I showed how increasingly racialized and exclusionary forms of governance enacted within the West for passport holders from the Middle East and North Africa, (re)shaped second generation Arab migrants' sense of proximity to the UAE. Even though participants of this study typically had a distinct notion of what their 'Arab culture' meant, 'Arabness' which typifies the UAE was seen by second generation migrants as preferable and compatible with their cultural identity when compared to other potential countries for settlement.

The findings of this research contribute to the growing yet limited literature on migrant lives in the Gulf States, which predominantly attend to the experiences of South Asian migrant groups. Findings in this paper, illustrated how, despite being subjected to the same citizenship and migration policies, second generation Arab migrant groups in the UAE experience social and legal boundaries between them and the local populations differently, based on their particular migration trajectory, their historical and cultural affiliation with the host community, as well as their nationality and the wider historical and political context: first, in the way Arabness was used by respondents both as a mean to express the degree of distance felt from Emirati citizens as well as a tool to establish proximity with them. Second, in comparison to other migrant groups, such as South Asians, the Arab migrants I interviewed expressed having increasingly limited options if they had to leave the UAE. The political turmoil present in the majority of the countries they originate from and the restrictive visa and immigration regimes in the West for such passport holders limited the countries that the informants could potentially emigrate to for education, settlement and citizenship acquisition (Khaishgi, 2017). This showed that, even though the migrants may arm themselves with strategic solutions to combat their temporary situation in the Gulf, the ability to connect socially and economically to multiple locales around the world, is determined not only by class but also nationality (Ruhs, 2013; Vora, 2013).

In addition to its contribution to Gulf Studies, the findings of this study also draw closer links between the Persian Gulf States, an understudied region despite their migrant dominant populations, and the wider literature on migration studies. The literary tendency to consider migrant populations of the Gulf as temporary, and therefore not diasporic or transnational, risk overlooking the everyday experiences of long term migrants in this region, and consequently positioning this part of the region as a 'sociological exception'. By illustrating how boundaries between migrant and citizens populations in

the UAE, are constructed and maintained as a response to social, political and economic events, I show the similar processes that explain the inclusions and exclusion of certain individuals to/from the boundaries of a nation. I argue that these boundaries are never absolute and fixed, even in the Gulf States, where exclusion of migrants from citizenship might suggest so.

While citizenship is central in demarcating boundaries both in the Gulf States and Europe, they do not solely determine how individuals identify themselves as being a part of the community or identified by others as such. Inclusions to and exclusions from the boundary of a nation is shaped by differentiated experiences and cultural affiliations individuals have with dominant groups in society. This is most evident in the way some second generation migrants in the UAE, despite not having access to citizenship, narrate themselves as a part of the nation, whilst many second generation born in the 'Western' countries, despite being legal members of these nations by birth, may feel alienated from dominant groups in their society. In this sense, the UAE is not an exceptional case, instead resembles any other society, where the promise of 'full citizenship' is a 'myth' (see Cohen, 2009:12)

The legal and social boundaries between migrant and citizen populations respond to social and political circumstances and therefore need to be examined within the larger historical and political context. Considering the unrest in the region and ensuing turmoil and political instability in the most densely populated Arab countries, one might expect political concerns of Gulf authorities towards Arab migrant populations to be reconfigured and reshape GCC countries' policy making (Babar, 2014). This is why it is important to see how political events affect not only the way certain migrant populations shape their identities in relation to local populations and vice-versa, but also their future plans in relation to Gulf countries, their countries of origin and elsewhere. Studying these populations' experiences and changing dynamics of boundaries between migrant and citizenship populations in the Gulf- whether on formal or informal basis- are crucial in understanding future migration flows to and from the Gulf States and transnational mobilities of migrants from Gulf States to other parts of the world.

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