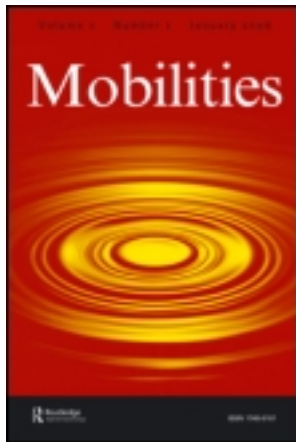


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Going and Coming and Going Again: Second-Generation Migrants in Dubai

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ABSTRACT *The government of the United Arab Emirates requires all foreign migrant workers to reside on temporary visas. This affects transnational mobility patterns among the one class of residents whom we should expect to show the least degree of transnationalism: second-generation migrants. While the degree of transnationalism varies, a very high number of these migrants leave, then return and then leave again from Dubai. Drawing on 51 semi-structured interviews conducted in Dubai amongst second-generation migrants, most of them of South Asian origin, I argue that the state's policy towards migrants is important, and more determining than other factors such as ethnic/nationality communities in understanding these migrants' transnational behaviour.*

KEY WORDS: Second generation; migrant; transnationalism; impermanence; citizenship; Dubai

Introduction: Is Dubai Just a 'Pitstop'?

Prince is an Indian corporate headhunter in his early twenties. He was born in Dubai in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and had never left the UAE until just before we met in 2006. In spite of his only having lived in Dubai, and having never travelled abroad, he told me, 'The fact is, for me Dubai is a pitstop, a place where you come, make a good amount of money and you get out'.

How can a place where one is born and raised be just a 'pitstop'? Interestingly, Prince's attitude is common among second-generation migrant workers born and/or raised in Dubai, the most populous of the seven emirates of the UAE. It indicates how Dubai is a place of mobilities (Walsh, 2009; on different types of mobility see Urry, 2007), where people are routinely on the move. If they are not physically mobile, then, like Prince, they are often plotting to move.

Prince's stance on mobility, I argue, is largely a function of the UAE government's residency policy, which holds that all non-citizens living and working in the UAE – 85% of the UAE population and over 90% of Dubai's population – possess

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three-year residence visas (usually renewable until the age of 60 so long as the individual is employed) with no legal possibility of permanent residence, and very little chance of attaining citizenship.¹ Thus, all migrants, the vast majority of whom are Asian or Arab, living in the UAE (indeed, throughout the Arabian Gulf countries of UAE, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman), including those born there, are temporary residents (Ali, 2010; Kapiszewski, 2001; Longva, 1997).

The relationship of migrants to the UAE then is mainly economic – they exist largely as ‘factors of production’. That is, all adult male migrants, from unskilled labourers to professionals, are there strictly to work. Women can reside as workers or dependents. Unlike other Asian cities with large transient migrant populations such as Singapore, which aim to attract and retain high-level professional talent with promises of lower tax rates and encouragement to become permanent residents or even citizens (Ong, 2007), Dubai shows no such consideration for individual migrants of any level, including the second generation.²

In this paper I consider how the non-incorporation and ‘permanent impermanence’ of migrants that results from the policies of the UAE government structures their transnational mobility. I specifically examine middle and upper-middle-class, second-generation migrants in Dubai, where I conducted field research. I focus on these second-generation migrants because, on the face of it, they should show a lesser tendency toward transnational behaviour; having grown up there, we might expect them to feel a sense of attachment and belonging in what should be their ‘home’. While the degree of concrete transnational practices will of course vary between individuals, I argue that the denial by the state of citizenship or permanent residency creates a situation where migrants *must* at some point consider, given their temporary status, whether to attempt to stay in Dubai (which is legally their ‘host’), go to their country of origin (which is legally, if not socially, their ‘home’), or go elsewhere, that is, find another ‘host’ that they might eventually call ‘home’ (generally, a western country).

Methods

This article is based on data gathered from 51 semi-structured interviews I conducted in Dubai from June–October 2006 among adult second-generation migrants, a category of people who have attracted hardly any scholarly attention in the literature on the Arabian Gulf. These people are not simply children of migrants, but are themselves classed as migrants as they must have their own residence visas independent of their parents once they reach the age of eighteen, with the exception of women who can remain as dependents on their husband’s or parent’s visas. The majority (37) of the interviews were taped and transcribed; for the rest I wrote notes during or after the interviews as those particular settings were not ideal for recording. The interviews lasted from 20 minutes to 4 hours; most lasted approximately one hour. Many of the people I interviewed I befriended, and our subsequent conversations greatly enhanced my understanding of their experiences as migrants.

I had nine separate strings of interviewees from people whom I met through friends in the United States, through the Internet, while searching for an apartment in Dubai, and through two chance encounters in Dubai. Of those interviewed, 29 were South Asians, 11 were Arab migrants, six were white European Union

citizens, two were Turkish and two were Somali. I also interviewed one Iranian Sunni Arab Muslim who had recently received UAE citizenship. Thirty were male and 21 were female; the youngest was 20 years of age, the oldest 37. All had professional positions or were entrepreneurs, except for two college students and two Arab government clerks. With the exception of the government clerks and a Somali nurse who were educated in government schools where the language of instruction was Arabic, all the rest were educated in private, secular, English-medium schools. Only six did not have at least a bachelor's degree. All the interviewees were by definition middle or upper-middle class, as there is a minimum income requirement for workers to have their families with them (AED 4000 per month at the time I conducted research, though this was raised to AED 10,000 per month in 2009; \$US1 = 3.7AED). The fact that these people were relatively well off, including the South Asians, largely insulated them from the most blatant forms of exploitation that people such as working-class Indians and Pakistanis suffered (Human Rights Watch, 2006; Kean & McGeehan, 2008).

Though I attempted to interact with as broad an array of second-generation migrants as I could, my sample was not fully representative. For instance, while there are sizeable Iranian and Filipino populations, I interviewed no Filipinos and only one Iranian. Also, while there is a sizeable population of stateless people (*bidoon*) who are neither citizens nor migrants, I did not interview any *bidoon*, many of whom are second- or even third-generation residents, mainly Arabs (often Bedouins or formerly pastoral nomads) or Iranians (Ferris-Lay, 2009). They have no passports and thus are not allowed to travel outside the country. Given their lack of mobility, minimal access to resources of the state (education, welfare, etc.) and relative poverty, their experiences certainly differ from those of the migrants I interviewed. Another possible source of bias is that my interviewees were all resident in Dubai. Their perspectives could differ from those born and raised in Dubai who have left and do not intend to return.

While I hesitate to make generalisations based on the interviews I conducted with second-generation migrants in Dubai, it should be stressed that all migrants, *regardless of nationality*, face the same forces of exclusion encountered by the migrants I interviewed, and these forces are similar throughout the Arabian Gulf. Even white migrants, who are socially treated much better than the rest of migrants from the developing world, also live under the same legal visa regime. Thus, the situations I describe here for second-generation migrants are likely to be similar for all migrants in Dubai, and generally throughout the Arabian Gulf.

Research Site

Dubai is a city that has garnered massive international attention in the recent past for its iconic construction projects and luxury living, as well as the exploitative treatment of its labouring class (Davis, 2006). Dubai has a population that nearly doubled from 1.1 million in 2005 to roughly 2 million by 2008. This rapid increase was due mainly to ever-increasing numbers of migrants who came to work in fast-expanding fields such as construction, finance, advertising and tourism. Migrants comprise 99% of employees in the private sector, and 91% of employees in the public sector (Ahmed, 2008). Dubai's population likely shrank in 2009 due to the economic recession, as migrants who lost their jobs had their visas cancelled, and

thus had to leave the country.³ This of course would include second-generation migrants as well, though none of the people I met, as far as I know, had to leave at this time due to job loss.

From the early 1900s Dubai was a town whose economy – based largely on trade and the pearling industry – was heavily dependent on foreign labour at all levels (Davidson, 2005; Heard-Bey, 1982). Iranian and Indian traders were encouraged to come to Dubai from the southern Iranian port city of Lingah, and lower-class workers were recruited for tasks such as crewmen in the pearling industry (Davidson, 2005, pp. 12–13). Lower-class workers were treated poorly and with disdain in a manner not dissimilar to what we see today with South Asian construction workers. For example, Peter Lienhardt wrote in the 1950s: ‘Baluchi water carriers, poor immigrants who could not understand Arabic and so were treated more or less like imbeciles by their customers, sold water from door to door, carrying it in paraffin tins loaded in panniers on the backs of donkeys’ (Lienhardt, 2001, p. 124).

Dubai’s recent economic development is largely the result of oil wealth. While Dubai itself never had much in the way of oil, it used its earnings from oil to develop other sectors of the economy, especially after the rise in oil prices following the 1973 oil crisis. Since the price of oil skyrocketed after 2001, Dubai has further benefited as Abu Dhabi and other oil-rich countries such as Saudi Arabia and Kuwait have invested vast sums of money in Dubai (Davidson, 2007, 2008).

Dubai’s economic and social system rests upon the fact that no matter how long migrants have been in Dubai they are legally treated like anyone else coming in today and they give up any claims on permanence and political rights. In return, migrants receive a tax-free income while living in a nearly crime-free, consumer-oriented society. This social compact is operative throughout the Arabian Gulf countries, all of which have roughly the same legal structures defining migrant workers as temporary and circumscribing their rights.⁴

Our understandings of the living conditions of migrants in the Arabian Gulf come mainly from fairly recent studies. Relatively few scholarly studies of migrants in the Arabian Gulf were conducted in the area before the 1970s (Birks & Sinclair, 1979; Secombe, 1983). In the 1980s there were a number of studies of recently arrived migrants, mostly working-class, throughout the Arabian Gulf. These studies, however, tended to be broad in scale, examining population flows, remittances and working conditions (e.g. Arnold & Shah, 1986; Eelens & Speckman, 1990; Ling, 1984; Weiner, 1982; see Secombe, 1985 for a thorough overview). One of the few micro-level studies from this time is an examination of social and psychological conditions of Pakistani labourers and professionals in Dubai (Ahmed, 1984).

Recently, there has been an increase in qualitative work conducted on migrants, and on the relationship between migrants and national citizens, throughout the Gulf.⁵ For example Walsh (2006, 2007, 2009) has studied recently-arrived British migrants in Dubai, looking at how they live in a social bubble, separate from nationals and developing-world migrants (see also Coles & Walsh, 2010). These younger professionals tend to live in Dubai as if on extended holiday, with casual sex and alcoholic consumption high on their social agenda. Vora (2008) has recently studied Indian middle-class migrants and how they feel a sense of belonging through ‘consumer citizenship’. Even though they are legally excluded, she argues that through consumption they find their place in Dubai.

Both Vora and Walsh describe the living situations of first-generation migrants – Walsh of mostly newly arrived Britons, and Vora of newly arrived and longer-term

Indian migrants. However, of all the work done on migrants in the Arabian Gulf, only Gardner (2008) addresses in any depth the conditions of long-term and second-generation migrants, examining the vulnerabilities and dilemmas that Indian migrants in Bahrain face. He argues that Indians in Bahrain deploy a ‘strategic transnationalism’ to protect against their systemic vulnerability in the face of the *kafala* system.⁶ But where Gardner sees transnationalism as a strategic response, I push his argument further to say that transnational behaviour among migrants is actually compelled by the *kafala* system, that is, migrants have no choice but to be transnational. In the rest of the paper, I examine the transnational behaviour of second-generation migrants.

Transnationalism

One of the most prominent paradigms under which researchers study the flows of migrants between countries is transnationalism. Scholars generally see transnationalism as individuals and families and/or ethnic/religious/nationality communities maintaining varying degrees and types of social, economic and/or political ties across two or more nations.⁷ Additionally, some migration theorists put forward the idea that actual mobility across borders is not even required, that living within a ‘transnational social field’ where others participate in transnational activities encompasses both those who move and those who stay behind (Levitt & Glick Schiller, 2004, p. 1003; see also Levitt, this issue).

While some scholars cast a much wider net as to who is a transnational, other writers have begun to emphasise, contrary to earlier formulations (e.g. Basch *et al.*, 1994), that not all international migrants are transnationals (Portes, 2003). Many if not most migrants – especially those in Western countries – have little qualitative or quantitative connection with their home countries outside of close family. Even where one finds the greatest numbers of first-generation immigrants who are engaging in transnational behaviour, the absolute numbers are still few relative to the total population of migrants (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007, p. 129; Waldinger & Fitzgerald, 2008).

One understudied element in the field is that of second-generation migrants, who, not surprisingly, tend to have fewer and less intense transnational connections than their parents with their parents’ country of origin (Levitt & Jaworsky, 2007, p. 134). However, many researchers assert that the children of migrants do engage in transnational activities, even if not to the same degree as first-generation immigrants (Levitt, 2009; Levitt & Waters, 2002; Smith, 2006). The other articles in this special issue offer the strongest evidence yet of second-generation return migration to their countries of parental origin. These young adults choose, for various reasons, to return to a place they lay claim to as theirs. The numbers of returnees varies by country of origin, and place of settlement.

As I emphasised above, Dubai presents a situation where *all* second-generation migrants, like other migrants in Dubai, regardless of country of origin, must at some point consider leaving Dubai. The key factor that makes these migrants in Dubai different from immigrants in other countries is the structured impermanence they live under as a direct result of the state defining them as temporary migrant contract workers, rather than as immigrants. These migrants differ from the children of guestworkers in Europe who, like Dubai’s migrants, are legally temporary

residents, but unlike migrants in the Arabian Gulf have avenues to some form of permanence. For example, first- and second-generation Italian immigrants in Switzerland were confronted with restrictive immigration policies (arguably the most restrictive naturalisation policies in Western Europe), making settling in Switzerland politically and economically difficult. Still, the vast majority of Italian immigrants today have permanent residence permits even though acquiring citizenship is quite difficult (Fibbi *et al.*, 2007; Wessendorf, 2007).

For most global migrants, such as with the other cases in this special issue, conscious decisions have to be made to leave one's home and engage in transnational behaviour. For second-generation migrants in Dubai, however, their transnationalism is compelled by the state, and is their default strategy. Portes makes the point that 'the ways immigrants are incorporated in the host society [affects] their propensity to engage in transnational initiatives' (2003, p. 879). In Dubai, the UAE and throughout the Arabian Gulf, migrants are barely incorporated into the host society beyond their economic activities; indeed they are not even considered immigrants. An advisor to the UAE Minister of Labour and Social Affairs put it bluntly: 'That is the whole reason contractual labour laws are used, so workers fall under contractual law rather than immigration law' (Bowman, 2007).

Studies of transnational migration to the Arabian Gulf states are just now beginning to appear, which will add to the theoretical and empirical depth of transnational studies, though these have mostly looked at how migrants affect social structures in the sending societies, such as India and Sri Lanka, rather than examining patterns of transnationalism from *within* the Gulf states (see Ali, 2007; Gamburd, 2000, 2008; Osella & Osella, 2008). There are two exceptions: a study of behaviour patterns of first-generation young professional British migrants in Dubai (Walsh, 2006, 2007, 2009; also Coles & Walsh, 2010), and one of Indian elites in Bahrain (Gardner, 2008). Walsh's study, as I noted above, only addresses short-term migrants, and Gardner's, while acknowledging the existence and importance of second- and third-generation Indian migrants in Bahrain, does not foreground their experiences of transnationalism in the manner I do here.

Citizenship

As I argued earlier in the paper, the possibility of citizenship affects transnational behaviour. The literature on citizenship has expanded to consider how the nation-state's boundaries have become literally and figuratively more permeable and, in some ways, less relevant. International treaties and institutions (especially those making human rights universal) and the increasingly free movement of people and capital greatly affect the sovereignty of states and how they treat both their citizens and non-citizens. Recently, concepts such as 'flexible citizenship', 'post-national citizenship' and 'denationalised citizenship' have become prominent (Ong, 1999; Sassen, 2003; Soysal, 1994). While these influential concepts, and other ideas that expand upon the notion of what is and who is a citizen, differ in many fundamental ways, they are similar in that they see 'citizen' as more than simply a legal category, and allow that people can claim to 'belong' to a place without legally belonging to that place.

Scholars of the Arabian Gulf are applying many of these concepts to those living there. For example, Vora (2008) asserts that Indian migrants in Dubai,

while not being able to receive legal citizenship, still practice ‘consumer citizenship’ – essentially belonging through buying. Kanna (2010) applies Ong’s notion of flexible citizens to the handful of Dubai’s Emirati citizens who venture into the private sector, arguing they ‘appropriate neoliberal discourses to mediate local ambiguities and tensions of social and gender identity’ (2010, p. 126). Gardner finds that the transnationalism of Indian migrants in Bahrain is a ‘strategic adjustment to the mobility of the neoliberal financescape’, and goes on to point out that their allegiance is to the ‘nonterritorial transnation’ (Gardner, 2008, pp. 74–75).

While there is much to be said for such conceptualisations of citizenship and belonging in this latest age of hypermobile capital and hypermobile people, legal citizenship (and the realistic possibility of obtaining it) is still important – you cannot legally and securely live in a place without a proper visa or citizenship. The UAE, which was relatively generous in granting citizenship up until the 1990s, has made it very difficult for migrants to naturalise. The process of naturalisation is not formalised, and requirements to be considered for citizenship are often thought to include thirty years’ residence, being Muslim, being Arab, being an Arabic speaker, having a clean police record, having ‘proper’ academic qualifications, and having a ‘healthy’ bank balance – though it is the government’s discretion to give citizenship after a screening process, at which point personal influence (*wasta*) comes into play (Kapiszewski, 2001, p. 49).

I met only one person who had naturalised, Hasan, a businessman in his mid-thirties who did so in 2003, along with his entire Iranian Sunni Arab family, though some of the Arab migrants I interviewed had family or friends who had received citizenship. Like other migrants, Hasan’s earlier life was shaped by the conditions of the three-year visa. He said, ‘you know, I grew up here all this time knowing I was a migrant. My dad never told us to prepare for citizenship, it just happened’. He pointed out how receiving citizenship immediately changed his circumstances: ‘I think what changed was subconscious: sense of security, a sense of living in this place and wanting to contribute to its long-term prosperity’. Hasan told me that, if he had not received citizenship, ‘I think I would’ve moved. In fact, I actually immigrated to Canada, but then I never stayed. I landed and came back’.

While it may seem on the face of it that Hasan, given his professional and entrepreneurial background, should be transnational like Ong’s flexible citizens, his newly acquired citizenship actually ‘grounds’ him, in the sense that he does not have to leave the way that other migrants in Dubai must. Nor does he want to, as can be seen from his stated desire to contribute to Dubai’s long-term prosperity. While it could be argued that second-generation transnationalism transcends issues of legal citizenship, given how broader practical and ontological forces shape lifestyles and mobilities, citizenship is still important. Having citizenship can lead to a more settled, less transnational existence in that there is no ‘push’ to go. Indeed, it is not surprising that second-generation migrants in developed countries who do possess citizenship in those countries engage in transnational behaviour to a far lesser extent than first-generation migrants.

While there are no publicly available records, it is unlikely that many who are eligible to be considered for citizenship get it. For Hasan, *wasta* (influence) eventually got the family citizenship. His father, he said, ‘was working with connections, lobbying’ for nearly ten years. Others though, while ‘qualified’, are not so fortunate.

I interviewed two Arab migrants in their mid-twenties whose fathers both had worked in government ministries for almost 30 years. These two, Zaid (a Syrian) and Hussein (an Egyptian), also work in government ministries, though at low-level positions as clerks (neither has a university degree). Both their families have had their applications for citizenship ‘in process’ for 20 years. They both held faint hope that they would acquire citizenship anytime soon, something they both desperately wanted.

In the Arabian Gulf, citizenship is particularly important and highly regulated given the extent of the welfare state (Longva, 2006). While there certainly are many dimensions to citizenship beyond the legal, such as cultural, economic, consumer and psychological dimensions of citizenship, these are largely meaningless without formal legal standing. Another way to think about this is a basic factor of being a citizen means that you generally cannot be deported – and if you get deported, these other forms of citizenship become moot.

For non-citizens these other forms of citizenship can only be meaningful if the threat of deportation is minimal. This is something that migrants in Dubai, most of whom are from the developing world, understand all too well. While there are no publicly available data on the numbers of deportations, they occur frequently enough that the stories of deportees are widely known to migrants and serve as cautionary tales, which work to keep labourers, middle-class and professional migrants in line. They are more careful to stay out of trouble with the police, they make certain not to engage in behaviour that might look in any way political, and they avoid criticism of the ruling family and national citizens in general. At any point and for practically any reason, the government or an employer may arbitrarily cancel a worker’s visa and trigger immediate deportation.

Still, many take the possibility of deportation ‘in their stride’, in large measure because deportation is oftentimes not permanent. People often overstay visas, lose their jobs or fail to get ‘no objection certificates’ from their employers when changing jobs – all of which can lead to temporary deportations, but the person can then reapply for a visa once they have left the UAE. John, a European-Canadian second-generation migrant in his late twenties working in his father’s construction company, casually made the point that, ‘You can get banned for six months, but you can still come back on a visit visa. It’s normal for people who live out here. Especially from our generation’. Regarding the possibility of deportation, he continued, ‘No, we’ve never really been worried about it’. While most of these migrants took their impermanent status in their stride they were quite aware that the laws are often applied in an ad hoc manner, which makes them rather cautious when it comes to certain behaviours.

Transnational Migration Patterns

One of my more interesting findings was not simply how common international migration was, but rather, how these migrants accepted their reality of going between multiple countries to live and work with such mental ease. They live with the possibility that their visas could be cancelled, and they may find themselves deported. But at the same time, in a way they are untethered from Dubai, as they do not legally belong. Since Dubai is not really their ‘home’, their attachment to it is much less than, say, for second-generation migrants in London or New York City

who do have legal permanence and are socially recognised as belonging, even if they do experience forms of exclusion such as garden-variety racism.

In the rest of the paper, I explore migration choices and strategies of these second-generation migrants. A major difference between these migrants and other global migrants is the sheer scale of mobility – most of the people I interviewed had studied and worked abroad before returning, many having migrated multiple times. While their individual decisions to migrate are voluntary (unless deported), their transnational behaviour is ultimately compelled by the three-year visa policy of the state.

Why Come Back?

Pamila, an Indian advertising professional in her early thirties who had lived in the United States and United Kingdom for university and work, had a simple but telling answer to the question, why come back. She told her mother in Dubai, ‘Mom, I’m going to come back to Dubai’. Her mother said ‘Why, are you stupid?’ To which she replied, ‘No, Dubai has this pull, and I want to be back there’.

In spite of the uncertainty they may or may not feel regarding the visa situation, all the migrants I interviewed who had left responded to this pull and chose to come back to Dubai. Close to two-thirds of the second-generation migrants I interviewed had completed university in the West, and of those, most had worked abroad as well. But they had all returned. The benefits of being in Dubai generally outweighed the precariousness of living on three-year visas that conceivably could be cancelled for any reason. In Dubai the professional migrant returned to find family, a lifestyle that in many ways is better than how they would live in the West or in their Asian or Arab countries of origin, and a booming job market – at least until the economic recession hit in late 2008.

The ‘good life’ that Dubai offers was a common theme I kept coming across. An incredible consumer-based economy has arisen to cater to all the desires of migrants – including an ever-increasing number of shopping malls, spas, bars, clubs and restaurants. The good life is especially predicated on the prevalence and affordability of personal household services of maids, nannies, ‘houseboys’ (grown men, actually), gardeners, cooks and drivers. (Close to 10% of the UAE population are maids.) These people are paid third-world wages, while most of the second-generation professionals I interviewed generally earned as much as their counterparts in Western countries, and tax-free at that. These personal services are made even more affordable as more than three-quarters of the second-generation migrants I interviewed lived with their parents. They nearly all had domestic help. Being upper-middle-class in Dubai means a much more comfortable style of life than that of a similarly situated person in the West. In short, if you have money, Dubai is easy living.

But that is the key – to have money. Levant, a Turkish business consultant in his mid-twenties recently back from graduate studies in London, stressed this when he said, ‘our family is pretty well-off here, we can have a really good life. These people with lower incomes, they have it really hard. If we [he and his brother, Muhammed] were on our own and with a little lower income, it might be better to be in Europe’.

Family, as Levant and most others pointed out, is of course another important reason to return. For instance, Tahniat, a Pakistani/Bangladeshi in her late twenties in public relations who had returned after studying and working in the United States said, ‘For me, my attachment being here is my family. I haven’t exactly come here – I didn’t come back for any career move. It was purely family’.

In addition to family and an easy style of living, the job market, which had been greatly expanding since the beginnings of the post-2001 economic boom, drew many people back to Dubai. Deepak, an Indian in his early thirties in the finance industry, put it this way in 2006, well before the recession hit in 2008:

More people are coming back than there ever were. The kids who graduated in 1996 or earlier all went away and stayed away. But it's such a sustainable economy in Dubai, it's a boom. There are multinationals opening up here, which can absorb people of some education level to come and work. And people are making pretty good salaries, I mean they're making 15, 20, 25,000 dirhams per month – that's a damn good salary, you know? Especially when you're living with your parents and not paying rent. They're putting together mini-fortunes.

Gloria, a graduate student in London in her late twenties, echoed Deepak's points. She herself will not come back, even though her British father and Indian mother still live in Dubai after 30 years. But she understands why many do return. She said, 'It is largely seen now as being totally acceptable, and not necessarily a failure, depending on if your new job is good or not, of course. I think this is due to Dubai's new status for other people around the world as a place to go and work'.

Why Leave?

In spite of having returned, most people I interviewed were considering leaving Dubai at some point in the near future, or a little further down the road. Until fairly recently, it was standard for second-generation migrants who were not 'IDB' (in daddy's business) to leave Dubai permanently. Gloria put it eloquently: 'If people did come back to Dubai to work after studying abroad, they were scorned for not being able to make it in the "real world" and having to come back to rely on daddy's contacts to find a job'. But, as both Gloria and Deepak pointed out above, it had become more socially acceptable for these migrants to return.

Even still, for all the compelling reasons that people gave for coming back and staying in Dubai, others gave equally compelling reasons why they were contemplating leaving. Their reasons are in many ways the mirror-opposites of those who intend to stay: lack of family and friends, lack of job opportunities and discrimination in the workplace. A common theme that emerged from my interviews was that for many people, even though they were happy enough to be in Dubai, they were fully prepared to leave, as the root structure of family and friends was not deep enough to keep them. For example, Pritim, an Indian editor in his early twenties, who was leaving for postgraduate studies in the United States, had no intention to return to Dubai. (Though two years later, he did return as he could not find a job in the United States and thus had to choose between going to India, his country of origin, a place where he never lived, or going to Dubai. He went to Dubai.) While having family in Dubai, he does not have many old friends left. I asked him, 'is it hard to pick up and go?' To which he replied:

Uh, that's a good question . . . Many of my closest friends have moved away. A lot of my friends in Dubai are newer than my old friends who moved out,

so that kind of affects things as well. Why? It's not as hard to leave newer friends than it is to leave older friends . . . My dad has a business, but there's no pressure that I have to take it over. I have memories over here, but you know, you can make memories somewhere else.

Unlike Pritim, Tahniat has deeper roots in Dubai. Even though she came back for family, and loves the lifestyle, she still thinks of Dubai as a temporary place, something quite evident when she told me how she and her friends have to remind themselves, 'Listen, this is not your home. Don't get too comfortable here, because there's always the chance that you will have to pick up your bags and leave one day'. Her comment suggested the tensions these migrants have living in a place where they are by definition transients.

Another reason people gave for leaving is limits to job opportunities. While many people come for better wages, tax-free incomes and the ability to advance faster in their careers than they might be able to in Europe or elsewhere, many migrants born in Dubai, especially from developing countries, find discrimination in many forms – such as a 'glass ceiling' on their advancement, racism in the work place and wage discrimination based on nationality.⁸

On the face of it, their decisions to return and to leave make them look like the 'flexible citizens' that Ong (1999) describes – cosmopolitan professionals shifting between countries looking for the best economic, professional and social deals. But in the end it is their impermanence that is the more basic driving force here. Faisal, an Arab-American Muslim university student, summed up how most of the migrants I met who intended on leaving felt:

I could never settle here in Dubai, never. They [nationals] have good hearts, but I know deep down they resent our presence. They feel we are infringing upon their culture and their way of life. We are only there to do a service. Our presence is only tolerated for as long we suit their purposes. The moment our purpose ceases to exist, we will be kicked out. It doesn't matter if we live here one year, two years, fifty years – as long as we have a use we can stay. The moment we don't, we have to get out. There is no system of citizenship here; we have no rights.

Where Will They Go?

Most of the second-generation migrants from developing countries I interviewed already had made arrangements to, or intended to, migrate to the West, either temporarily or permanently. Many of them regularly told me having a Western passport or residency greatly enhanced their sense of security. It makes international travel easier and it opens up work options. Of the second-generation migrants of Arab and South Asian descent that I interviewed, about half had passports or residency from the United States, Western Europe, Australia or Canada, in addition to their Arab or South Asian passports. Two-thirds of them had studied and worked abroad, nearly all in Western countries. These migrants oriented their lives – in varying degrees – in relation to three, and sometimes four, countries.

Many of those who did not already have the security of western residency or family network connections in the West, whether they were privileged or not,

desired it. Western residency serves as a contingency plan, a strategic back-up in case they have to leave Dubai.⁹ Of the people I interviewed who did not have western residency, three-quarters expressed a desire to acquire western residency, primarily in Canada or Australia. It is interesting that so many people were concentrating their efforts to obtain Canadian or Australian residency, as they perceived these countries to be more inviting to immigrants than the United States or the United Kingdom (Mason & Preston, 2007).¹⁰ A local paper reported on the phenomenon of Canada as a back-up plan, citing a year-long survey conducted by the Canadian embassy in Abu Dhabi, which found that 98% of applicants for immigrant visas were planning to return to the UAE almost immediately after landing in Canada, like Hasan had done before he acquired citizenship (Abraham, 2007).

Having residency in a western country provides a safety net if these migrants are forced to leave Dubai before they want to, or for when they retire and will have to go in any case. For the vast majority of the Arab and Indian migrants I met, going back to their countries of origin to settle was not a palatable option for them occupationally or socially. Of the non-western people I interviewed, only three – two brothers from Mangalore, India, and one store clerk from Bombay – were comfortable with the possibility of returning to their country of origin to settle. (The brothers moved to Mangalore three years after I met them.) For the rest of the migrants I interviewed from South Asian or Arab countries, ‘home’ was a nice place to visit, but not to work or live. Haya, an Egyptian nurse in her mid-twenties, put it most succinctly when I asked how it would be if one day her visa was cancelled and she had to go to Egypt: ‘God, don’t say that! I would love to visit Egypt, visiting is good. Enjoy it and then come back’.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have argued that the three-year visa policy of the state and the state’s inflexibility towards citizenship create a situation where second-generation migrants in Dubai are by definition and in practice transient, and shapes how they approach international mobility. While the transnational behaviour of many of these professional migrants is likely shaped by their ability to be competitive in a global job market and by a general sense of cosmopolitanism (Ong, 1999), I argue that the most important underlying structure affecting their patterns of transnationalism is the exclusionary policy of the state. Because of this policy, at some point nearly all migrants will have to leave, and when that time comes they are prepared to go. In fact, most of the second-generation migrants I interviewed had exhibited concrete transnational behaviour, studying and working abroad before returning, with many having left and returned to Dubai multiple times. This contrasts with second-generation immigrants in western countries who are more likely to be legally and socially incorporated (to varying degrees – e.g. more so in the United States, less so in Germany), thus leading to a predictably lesser degree of transnational behaviour compared to first-generation immigrants.

Because many Arab and South Asian migrants in Dubai have residency or citizenship in western countries in addition to their countries of passport, their transnational behaviour spans multiple countries. This study adds to our understanding of how people manage transnational mobility between multiple countries. Unlike the other papers in this issue, those returning to Dubai are not returning ‘home’ in the

sense of their parental country of origin. 'Home' for the bulk of them is a third-world country they would just rather not go to. They are returning to their original 'host', Dubai, knowing their return is temporary, even if long-term. Eventually they must go, and nearly all the people I interviewed either have made or are in the process of making plans for that eventuality.

I have also argued that the transnational behaviour of these particular migrants is not tied to the idea of ethnic or national communities; that is, there were no marked differences in transnational behaviour between people of different nationalities. The main variable underlying their transnational behaviour, again, is the state. The state here is not hostile to these migrants, rather it just does not accord them any kind of recognised, permanent status. While the case of transnationalism among second-generation migrants in Dubai may be somewhat extreme, it does point to the need to pay more attention to the role of the state in affecting patterns of migration.

Notes

1. There are different categories of visas for students, dependents and older workers. But the vast majority of migrants working in the UAE reside there on three-year residence visas. Men over the age of 18 must either be in school or working. Women can be dependents on their father's or husband's visas, which interestingly gives them more freedom in the labour market as their visa does not have to be tied to their employer, so they can change jobs without the threat of a ban or deportation (assuming they have a dependent's visa rather than being sponsored by the employer). Most people had assumed that purchasing property in 'freehold' areas entitled them to three-year residence visas. Recently the Dubai and UAE governments clarified that this is not so. In early 2009, the UAE government announced that six-month visas would be granted to people who purchased property valued in excess of AED one million (\$US 272,500), though the visa did not allow an individual to work. In any case, all visa categories for migrants throughout the UAE and elsewhere in the Arabian Gulf are temporary. For the most detailed discussion of this system as practised in Kuwait (similar to how other Arabian Gulf countries practise it), see Longva (1997).
2. For a broader look at the economic and social conditions of migrants in Dubai, see Ali (2010).
3. How much the population contracted is a matter of speculation; governmental figures regarding population are generally spotty at best. In April 2011, the government announced that the population of Dubai stood at a little more than 1.9 million (<http://www.dsc.gov.ae/EN/NewsMedia/News-Releases/Pages/Detail.aspx?NewsId=38>), a rather startling number given that the construction industry, which slowed tremendously in 2009, had yet to recover in 2011.
4. Though in August 2009, Bahrain announced that it is scrapping the sponsorship system altogether. It is too early to tell what the effects of this will be.
5. On Kuwait, see Longva (1997, 2006). Regarding Qatar, Nagy (2006). For comparisons of Indians living in Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates, see Leonard (2002, 2003, 2005, 2007). For a broader look at migrants throughout the Arabian Gulf states, see Kapiszewski (2001, 2006). Most recently, a special issue of the journal *City and Society* had three articles examining migrants in Bahrain (Gardner, 2008; Louer, 2008; Nagy, 2008).
6. The *kafala* or sponsorship system refers to the ways that migrant workers' residence visas are tied to their sponsors, usually their employers. See Ali (2010), Kapiszewski (2001) and Longva (2000, 2006).
7. For a comprehensive review see Levitt and Jaworsky (2007). For a major critique of the transnationalism research programme, see Waldinger (2004). For a counter-critique to Waldinger, see Glick Schiller and Levitt (2006).
8. In some (though not all) industries and firms, differential wages are often paid out based on nationality, especially at lower levels of employment. A 2004 survey by *Gulf Business* lays out average wages for various positions and how they vary by nationality. The data clearly shows a wage hierarchy across nationality lines in all the Arabian Gulf countries, in descending order from local Arab, to western, to migrant Arab, and then the lowest paid, Asians (Indians,

Pakistanis, Filipinos etc.); http://www.donaldlee.net/expat/gulf_business_2004_salary_survey.aspx. In 2007, *ArabianBusiness.com* conducted a survey of workers in the Arabian Gulf and found similar results. In terms of average pay of professional workers, for example, they found that Indians earned less than half of what Americans earned (\$45,000 for Indians, \$96,000 for Americans). The survey was based on self-reporting by nearly 9000 respondents; <http://www.arabianbusiness.com/salary-survey-report-2009>.

9. This is also the case in Bahrain and throughout the Arabian Gulf. See Gardner (2008).
10. Though certain types of professionals, like those in the advertising industry, are left out, as Canada has a points system that favours professionals such as doctors, engineers and teachers. This may change however as Canada's visa policy may be in the process of becoming more restrictive.

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