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Migrants' Strategies of Coping and Patterns of Accommodation in the Oil-Rich Gulf Societies: Evidence from the UAE

SULAYMAN KHALAF* and SAAD ALKOBAISI**

ABSTRACT *This paper presents an overview of ethnographic documentation of the foreign migrants' strategies and patterns of accommodation in the oil-rich Arab Gulf societies. Documentary evidence is drawn from the UAE in the form of short case studies of families and individuals of both Arab and Asian migrant groups as well as field observations. The evidence is presented as an illustration of similar processes taking place across the Gulf. The migrants investigated represent low-income workers and a few middle-income technicians and professionals. Globalization is used as a general guiding theoretical framework to provide integration and coherence to the modes of presentation and explanation of the ethnographic material. Particular attention is given to the differing political economics of the labour-receiving and labour-sending countries in order to account for the prevalence of certain strategies of coping among migrants, and also to explain the slight variations found among Arab and Asian migrants.*

'Do you like working and living in the Emirates?', I asked an Iranian immigrant from Mukran. 'I am forced to', he answered with a serious tone, then went on to say, 'in Mukran our life in the old days was simple. We had grain, bread, dates, sheep and goats. Life has changed. There are many new demands in life now, yet work opportunities over there remain very limited. We had to migrate for work.' (an Iranian farm labourer, 1997). Deterritorialization, in general, is one of the central forces of the modern world. It brings laboring populations into lower class sectors and spaces of relatively wealthy societies. (Arjun Appadurai, 1990, p. 301).

Introduction

The export of oil on a commercial scale since the early 1950s has generated a silent revolution in Gulf Arab societies, bringing about numerous transformations. The magnitude of these has been so great that local writers often describe

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their modern history in terms of two periods: pre-oil and post-oil. The advent of oil occurred in the various Gulf countries (Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, UAE and Oman) in different decades.¹ Nonetheless, as these countries approach the end of the twentieth century they share many similarities in the development of their socio-economic and political structures, so much so that they together constitute a societal type particular to this oil-rich region. On the one hand, rapid modernization has been achieved in the material aspects of life, while on the other hand, forms of socio-cultural and political organization remain relatively traditional and conservative, only touched mildly by the forces of the oil economy. This significant character of the rapidly changing Gulf societies has been noted by many observers (Zahlan, 1989; Khalaf, 1998). The small oil-exporting societies of the Gulf stand now as a particular societal paradigm different from the developed capitalist industrial societies or those of the developing Third World.

The accumulating oil revenues in the coffers of the small oil-States empowered them to embark on accelerated modernization processes. The developmental dynamics generated by oil wealth forced the once small, relatively homogeneous mud-walled sea towns to burst out of their old mud shells and intimate social forms into sprawling suburbs, where residents enjoy air-conditioned spacious new houses, expensive cars and a comfortable consumer existence. Old towns and villages have been transformed into expanding commercial capitals linked to the cosmopolitan cities of our present-day world.²

These introductory notes lead us to some central questions related to our research topic. How did such change come about? Who has been involved in the processes of building the new Gulf societies? Obviously there have been numerous factors and agents involved, but what concerns us here is the role played by foreign migrants in the overall modernization process.

The local populations of the pre-oil Gulf societies were small and lacked the technical skills needed for modernizing their traditional societies. Because of this, the importation of labour of all levels of skill has been adopted since the start of the oil economy as a major State policy in all Gulf countries. This policy has quickly generated a severe dependence on expatriate labour. The inflow of foreign labourers and professionals has continued in such large numbers that some of the national populations in these Gulf societies (Kuwait, Qatar and UAE) have become minorities in their own countries. The extreme case is the UAE where it is estimated in the late 1990s that the nationals constituted only 10–20% of the total population (Heard-Bey, 1997), and only 10% participation in the total labour force (Al-Mansour, 1996).³

¹ Oil was discovered in Bahrain in 1933, Kuwait 1946, Qatar 1949, UAE 1962 and Oman in 1967.

² Oil wealth improved the incomes of Gulf nationals in dramatic ways. The GNP per capita in the Gulf countries in 1993 was as follows, in US \$: Kuwait 19,360; Bahrain 8,030; Qatar 15,030; UAE 21,430 and Oman 4850. *World Development Report 1995, I and Ia* (Washington: World Bank, Oxford University Press, 1995).

³ According to the 1995 census, the total population of the UAE was 2,411,041 and the labour force was 1,335,894 (Ministry of Planning, UAE). In 1993 migrants formed about 71% of the total population, and about 90% of the labour force. Calculated from A.R. Al-Faris, *Higher Education and Labor Market in the United Arab Emirates* (Dubai: Nadwat Al-Thaqafa wa al 'Ulūm Publications, 1996) p. 84, Table 5.

The present paper provides ethnographic documentation of the labourers' strategies of coping and patterns of accommodation in the Gulf societies. The ethnographic evidence presented is from the UAE, but illustrates similar processes taking place in all the Gulf States. Although there are slight variations within the different countries, these do not invalidate the general picture which we aim to construct in this inquiry.⁴

The data will be presented in the form of case-studies of Arab and Asian expatriate individuals, and is also based on long-term field observations by both researchers. Most of these cases were collected over a 2 year period, from early 1997 to January 1999, and document unskilled workers, but we will also deal with a few middle income professionals. Because of limitations of space, only nine cases will be presented, but these illustrate the diversity and complexity of the expatriate phenomenon. They will be contextualized within a general description of the broader socio-economic and political transformations in the UAE.

A Theoretical Note

The process of change in the UAE cannot be adequately understood outside the dynamics generated by the oil economy and the larger forces of globalization. The flows of strategic resources such as oil and of migrant workers across national boundaries are among the most conspicuous phenomena within the present-day global scene. Appadurai notes that the process of 'deterritorialization, in general, is one of the central forces of the modern world, since it brings laboring populations into the lower class sectors and spaces of relatively wealthy societies' (1990, p. 301).

Writers have explained this international labour migration using different analytical perspectives, such as the historical structural perspective located within the framework of the dependency model (Cardoso and Faletto, 1979). According to this perspective, international movement of wage labour is conceived as unequal interchange of different modes of production. The exploitation of foreign migrant labourers is viewed as generating profit for the capitalist system. However, the socio-economic disequilibrium approach looks at the movement of labour as a necessary element of normal population adjustment equilibrium (Ling, 1984). According to this perspective, Griffin views migration of ordinary people to higher paid jobs abroad 'as a major avenue of escape from poverty and oppression' (1976, p. 353). Social anthropologists (Kasdan, 1970; Engelbrektsson, 1978) have developed a perspective which examined migration as a dynamic process of adjustment operating across numerous social fields, and involving many units: a sending unit, a receiving unit, a migrating unit and the larger unit to which others belong.

⁴ Conditions of foreign migrants are similar throughout the Gulf States. While there are minor variations in total numbers and nationalities of migrants, the legal, political, social and economic conditions they work under are much the same.

The relevance of globalization theory here is that it goes beyond the limitations usually associated with perspectives that focus on structures and variables of unequal economic exchange. In his delineation of the various constituents for the theoretical construct of a 'global cultural economy', Appadurai identifies five sub-scenes which he labels as 'ethnoscapes, technoscapes, finanscapes, mediascapes and ideoscapes' (1990, p. 296). The core of Appadurai's model of global cultural flows revolves around the fact that 'people, machinery, money, images and ideas' now follow increasingly different paths, travel with different speeds, and are viewed by local cultures with different attitudes and subsequently receive different reactions from peoples and cultures across the world (Appadurai, 1990, p. 301). The notion of 'ethnoscapes' which is related to deterritorialization is of central concern to our paper. In Appadurai's words, it refers to:

the landscapes of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers and other moving groups and persons who constitute an essential feature of the world. (1990, p. 297)

These now function on larger scales as men and women from villages in India, Pakistan, the Philippines, Syria, and Egypt think not just of moving to the cities in their own countries but to destinations like Kuwait, Dubai, Canada and the US (Nair, 1986; Farjani, 1983).

Here we may raise the question as to what extent the formulation proposed by Appadurai is relevant to our purpose in this paper. Globalization means among other things the widening and deepening of the five scapes Appadurai identified as constituents of the global scene. The various scapes are very visible in the present day Gulf States. Were we to pull away the global constituents of the migrants' ethnoscapes from a society like the UAE, the entire society would cease to be what it is now, as more than 80% of its population would be eliminated. This in turn would generate severe repercussions throughout the society. The whole development process would come to a halt.

Guided by Appadurai's ideas, globalization should not be used for analytical purposes as a wholesale package with regard to its workings and effects on local cultures. Globalization carries relevance in providing analytical integration only when its constituent macro processes are contextualized within the particularities of the local society and culture. Gulf society as an emerging type has the dual characteristics of rapid economic modernization, yet remaining traditional in the politico-legal and cultural dimensions. This affects how society reacts to the various scapes of globalization, including migrants. The interplay between the local particularities and global forces produce conditions which affect the way migrants adjust their behaviour and create coping strategies. Given the inferior political, legal, economic and social status of migrants, they have opted to accommodate instead of entering into conflict situations, particularly with the locals.

Our paper focuses on this world of 'expatriates in motion' as they labour far away from home in the wealthy society of the UAE. Their labour is geared towards realizing their dreams of building a family and a home with reasonable

material security. Their quest drives them to creatively employ certain sets of strategies of accommodation and survival. In the following section we will present nine short case studies to illustrate the migrants' diverse experiences and the multiple strategies of coping and modes of accommodation they commonly utilize to survive and secure their interests.

Case 1: Abdalla and his Brothers and Nephews

Abdalla is from a rural community in the north-east of Syria and is in his mid-forties, the third of six brothers. He studied land surveying in Damascus, graduating in 1975, and was then employed by Raqqa city municipality. In 1980 he married a kinswoman from his own tribal lineage. Before coming to the UAE in 1985, he borrowed about US \$2000 from relatives to support himself in the initial phase of his migration. He had obtained his residency visa through contacts of a Syrian working for one of the young shaikhs of Abu Dhabi. He spent almost a whole year without a job, but through friends and contacts he found a position in the Department of Public Works in Abu Dhabi in 1986. Since that time he has succeeded in creating a 'nest' of extended family in Abu Dhabi, as he has brought two of his younger brothers to work and live in the UAE with their wives and children as well as four nephews.

Abdalla spent his first 5 years in the Emirates without his wife and children. Initially he wanted to ensure the security of a job and housing, as well as to handle his own personal psychological adjustment to the thought of raising a family as a migrant. Now he has six children who have mostly been raised here. In addition to his monthly salary of Dh 3800, he now receives a housing allowance of Dh 40,000 a year as part of his contract. The rent for his apartment is Dh 50,000, and his four nephews pay the remainder.

Abdulrahman, the youngest of the six brothers, came to the Emirates in 1988 when Abdalla succeeded in getting him a residency visa. Abdulrahman is now 27 years old, and has completed only 3 years of secondary schooling. After his arrival he spent 14 months without a job, but is now working as a supervisor in a large land-leveling project in Ghantoot, near Abu Dhabi city.

Abdulrahman lived with Abdalla when he first came to Abu Dhabi, and even after his marriage in 1995, he and his wife continued to occupy one room in the brother's house. This arrangement continued for two and half years, and then Abdulrahman moved to live in Dubai, renting an apartment for Dh 50,000 per year. He now has two children and his monthly salary is around Dh 3600. A significant addition to his salary, more than Dh 9000 a month, comes from the monthly tips given to him by the various truck companies contracted for the Ghantout project, and this enables him to pay the apartment rent. His total earnings far exceed those of his brothers.

In 1993 Abdalla succeeded in finding a work visa for another brother, Ibrahim. He is 37 years old and has a university degree in agriculture from Syria. He married one of his maternal cousins before coming to the Emirates, and now has three children. Upon arrival in Abu Dhabi he lived with his brothers for a

whole year without employment, and then found a job in the Department of Public Works in Abu Dhabi. His work involves soil analysis and he spends his time between the laboratory and construction sites. He receives an adequate housing allowance as part of his contract, and lives now in the same neighbourhood as his older brother, Abdalla. This residential proximity allows them not only to visit each other frequently but also to engage in the frequent exchanges of food gifts expressing social closeness. The brothers' visits to their home in Syria are not as frequent as those of their wives, who return home every summer for the school holidays.

The three brothers started a partnership with a car mechanic from Syria whom they had come to know here. Initially in 1995 they provided him with capital to finance the venture, and this has been bringing them approximately Dh 60,000 every year. Progressively the three brothers are making some investments back in Syria. Abdalla is building a large villa in the village, costing seven million Syrian pounds (US \$140,000), and Abdulrahman has bought two apartments. Their plan is to carry on working in the Emirates for another 6 years in order to save sufficient capital to purchase agricultural land and property back home.

Abdalla was also successful in securing work visas for four nephews. They all work in the Department of Public Works, either as junior clerks or on large State development projects, and their salaries vary from Dh 2000 to Dh 3500. They have been living with Abdalla since their arrival. They contribute Dh 10,000 per year as their share of rent, and continue to share food expenses. This strategy has allowed the brothers and their nephews to cope well in an expensive city. House sharing is close to the life patterns those men are used to back home in their own family and village community.

Case 2: Mahmoud, the Egyptian Farm Labourer

Mahmoud Al-Khashen is in his late forties and has been in the UAE for the last 20 years. He comes from a peasant family, as one of six brothers who inherited a small farm of 8 acres in the village of Sumbad, Tantata Province, in the Nile Delta. As the brothers married and had families, the farm proved inadequate to support them all.

Mahmoud works as an agricultural labourer on a farm belonging to one of Al-Maktoum shaikhs. It is located in the small village of Qaratees in the desert interior of Dubai emirate. Currently he is a supervisor on the farm which has 12 labourers: seven Egyptians and five Bangladeshis. He used to earn Dh 1200 a month, but due to his long experience the salary is now increased to Dh 1500.

Mahmoud has been successful in bringing to the Emirates three of his brothers, who initially also worked as farm labourers. However, one of them is now an *imam* (prayer leader) of a small mosque in Ras al-Khaimah emirate. Unlike farm labourers, an *imam* has the privilege of being able to bring in his wife and children to share his migrant life. Another brother obtained a job in Dubai Municipality as a junior clerk and shares accommodation with other Egyptian friends. The third brother still works on a farm in Dubai.

Mahmoud has his housing and food provided for him on the farm. The workers live in three rooms; the Bangladeshi workers share one room and the Egyptians the other two—they have separate cooking arrangements. Mahmoud is actually in a position to save most of his monthly earnings, and this has enabled him to support his family back home and even send one of his daughters to Tanta University to study English literature.

Mahmoud returns to Egypt every year for 3 months in the summer. He does not get paid during his vacation, but this is his personal choice in order to accommodate the demands of his own family life and his supervision over its affairs. Mahmoud is quite a religious man, and he leads the other farm workers in their daily prayers.

Case 3: Younis, the Camel Shepherd

Younis is a Sudanese young man, 26 years old. He has been in Dubai for the last 5 years, working as a shepherd for the camel farms of one of the ruling shaikhs of Dubai. He works and lives with another 30 Sudanese camel shepherds, seven Pakistanis and Bangladeshis who work in the camel farm as cleaners, two Pakistani cooks and seven young Sudanese boys who work as *rakbiya* (camel jockeys). The farm is managed by a Bedouin *mudhammer* (camel trainer), who is responsible for training camels for the races.

Younis is more fortunate than other camel labourers, as the wages given in this private camel farm are far higher than usual. His monthly wage is Dh 2000, and in addition he receives a generous bonus at the end of the racing season. Food and accommodation are provided to all the camel labourers by the owner of the farm. Some Sudanese shepherds bring along with them their young sons or nephews to be employed as camel jockeys, thus adding another Dh 600–800 to their monthly income.

Younis comes from Abu Dlaiq region, east of Khartoum, from the camel herding tribe of Al-Bataheen. There are now perhaps more than 2000 migrant camel shepherds from northern Sudan employed in camel farms which breed and train racing camels. Younis visits his family in Sudan once every 2 years, when he is allowed to take a long 3 month leave without pay. A few days before his departure he makes trips to see relatives and friends working in different farms in the Emirates in order to collect personal messages, money remittances or gifts for their families back home.

Younis got married 6 years ago. Now he has two sons; one is five and the other is two years of age. He spends a good portion of his savings on gifts carried home for scores of family members as well as other close relatives. He admits that it is very taxing financially, but then he explains that it could not be avoided.

Case 4: Ahmad, the Primary School Teacher

Ahmad is a 33 year old Syrian, and came to the UAE in 1988 to work as a school teacher. He comes from a shaikhly family background, but in the Ba'th

land reform measures Ahmad's family lost large areas of irrigated land along the Euphrates River.

Ahmad is the third oldest in a family of four brothers and two sisters. He graduated from secondary school in 1983 at a time when his family's material conditions were quite depressed. He entered teacher training college and then taught in local primary schools for several years. He was still single and earned a salary of 3000 Syrian pounds (US \$150).

It was Ahmad's brother, Abdul Razzak, who first came to the Emirates in 1981 and then helped to bring in Ahmad and two of his cousins. Abdul Razzak worked in a commercial company for 2 years, and then he obtained a job in a government department where he has been working since 1983. The other two cousins had university degrees but did not stay long in the Emirates, and left after a few years.

When Ahmad first arrived in the Emirates he was motivated to work hard:

I worked for months as a clerk in Abu Dhabi municipality. My monthly salary was only Dh 2500 per month. My work in the municipality finished at 2 o'clock in the afternoon. Then from 2:30 till 6:30 I was working in a private school. Then I started giving private lessons starting at 7:00 in the evening until 9:30. My total earnings per month were Dh 8900. In fact if I hadn't got my teaching job in the Ministry of Education I would have continued that hard and vigorous work pattern. I was motivated to work about 15 hours a day to prove myself, to support myself financially and to make some savings.

Ahmad then worked as a primary school teacher in Abu Dhabi for 4 years. At that time he was still unmarried, lived with his brother, and earned Dh 4000 a month. He also gave private lessons, even though this was not permitted by the Ministry of Education. He taught a group of five students on a regular basis, earning an additional Dh 5000 a month.

My tutoring on the side was exposed, and subsequently the Ministry terminated my contract at the end of 1993. I had no choice but to return to Syria for a whole year, during which I tried my luck in the agricultural business. Success was not on my side, and the resulting loss was about US \$5000. Meanwhile my brother Abdul Razzaq continued trying to secure me once again a teaching position in the Emirates. Eventually I was given a teaching job in the Al-Ain education district, away from Abu Dhabi. One Ministry official explained to us that it was better to send me far away from the place where I was doing private teaching. I was sent to a small village called Al-Qua' far in the desert interior near the Omani borders. Initially it felt like I was being exiled, but it was alright.

I save on average around half a million Syrian pounds (US \$10,000) every year. In 1994 I got married to my cousin in the village. She stays behind in Syria with my mother and her own folks. My brother Abdul Razzaq has also kept his wife and children back home in Syria. I send money to my mother, wife and one child once every 3 months via a money exchanger. Four years ago I borrowed Dh 40,000 from the bank in order to build myself a family home back in the village, and in 1998 I again borrowed another Dh 50,000.

We visited Ahmad in 1997 in the small house which he shared with two other Syrian teachers. They liked to share housing when they were without their

families as it helped to save on costs and prevented loneliness. They also shared the costs of renting a car and commuted every day to the rural schools. In the house sharing arrangement one man cooked, another was responsible for food shopping and keeping a budget, and Ahmad did the driving. Household chores were rotated among the three.

In the summer of 1997 the Syrian housemates separated as their families came to live with them. Ahmad bought himself an old car and now lives in Al-Qoa' village. He has a mobile telephone and likes to visit Al-Ain twice a week to break away from the simple village life in the depths of the Arabian desert. When Ahmed returned to primary school teaching in 1994 his salary was Dh 4600, but with increments he now receives Dh 5200. In addition he has been involved in a special illiteracy eradication program in the village and receives Dh 1500 a month for this extra work. He says that having ample free time drives him to spend money in unnecessary ways. He avoids being attracted by the consumer-oriented entertainment in the big cities of Dubai and Abu Dhabi, and visits his brother in Abu Dhabi only once a month. Ahmad's personal monthly expenditure is around Dh 2000.

Case 5: Golam, the Small Building Contractor

We met Golam in September 1997. He is 50 years old, a Patani, from the Peshawar region in Pakistan. His initial experience of working in the Gulf was in Oman where he spent 5 years. He has been in Al-Ain for the last 3 years, and works as a small building contractor involved in house repairs, extensions, and painting. Currently he employs four Patani workers.

Golam earns on average about Dh 3000 a month. He lives in Al-Maqam, with six other Patani construction and maintenance workers. Each pays Dh 200 per month in rent. They all share meals; everyone buys food items needed and the balance is calculated at the end of each month. Golam's aspiration is to find a new *kafeel* (sponsor) to help him expand his enterprise so that he can make a better income. He explained that a *kafeel* wants money, at least Dh 10,000 as a fee. 'Many times in our type of work the *kafeel* will utilize his position to ask you to do repairs to his own house or those of his relatives without paying. Many Bedouin people have benefitted a lot from this *kafeel* business. They are sitting somewhere, yet they get yearly income from us foreign workers. Previously *kafeel* asked for reasonable sums of money. Now things are just too expensive'.

Golam has four brothers and two married sisters. One of his brothers works as a taxi driver in Sharjah emirate. He also has a nephew working in Sharjah as a truck driver earning a monthly income of Dh 3500. Golam got married 15 years ago but unfortunately all his children have died shortly after birth. He got married for the second time in March 1997 to a 15 year old girl and returned to the Emirates after settling her with his first wife and his mother. He goes to Peshawar once every 18 months.

Case 6: Nizar, the Shepherd

We met Nizar in October 1998 as he was making his way to Dubai. Nizar is a Balushi from Iran; he is a tall 42 year old with a neatly groomed beard of salt and pepper colouring. He is illiterate, and has been working as a sheep and camel shepherd for the last 10 years. He receives a monthly salary of only Dh 700. He lives in a lonely tent pitched for him in the desert where the animals return for their water and evening food. He has no companions, but the Bedouin farm owner checks on him about two to three times a week, driving up in his 4WD Toyota with a mobile telephone in his hand.

Nizar was going to Dubai to arrange for a visa for his brother who had also worked in the Emirates for 12 years. They have a Bedouin friend who has volunteered to be a *kafeel* for his brother without payment. Although his brother is an Iranian he travels on a Pakistani passport. Since the Balush people live across the borders of the two countries, they have been crossing borders to obtain Pakistani passports in order to facilitate their migration plans. He commented that:

In Iran there is military conscription for national service and State bureaucracy is watched over carefully. In the Balush region of Pakistan there are many lax bureaucrats and much corruption. Dh 2000 will get you a Pakistani passport and nationality certificate while you remain sitting here in the Emirates. It is easy and commonly practiced. That is why you have too many actually Iranian Balushi's carrying Pakistani travel documents.

Nizar has two boys and one young girl. He wants a dozen of them, yet he feels sad that they are growing up without seeing much of them. He visits them once every 2 years.

Case 7: Hassan, the Indian House Servant

Hassan is a young Muslim from Kerala, India. He was in his early twenties when he came to the Emirates in 1988. His cousin, who worked in the Army as a cook, managed with the help of an Army officer to obtain a visa for him. Hassan had a chain of jobs as a domestic helper in different households in Abu Dhabi. His last employers terminated his work when they opted to employ maids from the Philippines. Once again his experienced cousin managed to get him a job as a domestic helper in an army officer's house.

When Hassan was interviewed in 1991 he did not like his job as a house servant but he had tolerated it for several years. He worked long hours every day, and his description of his duties reveals the daily work pattern of domestic servants.

My day starts around dawn at 6 o'clock in the morning by making coffee and tea. Then I water the garden for a good half hour. Then I prepare breakfast for all the people in the house, five children, the officer, his wife and his old father. After that I turn to vacuum the entire six-bedroom house and clean the three bathrooms. Around 10 o'clock

I make myself breakfast and then attend to a few miscellaneous things around the house. At eleven I start preparing for lunch. Lunch is served at 2 o'clock. After lunch they often take a nap but not me. I have to clear the table and clean the dishes. Then I eat my lunch. Next I turn to the laundry and put all the dirty clothes in the washing machine. After that I wash the family cars. This I don't do every day. Then I take the washing out of the machine and hang it out in the garden to dry. Around 7 o'clock I start preparing for dinner. After cleaning and clearing the dishes I turn to ironing the clothes washed earlier in the day. It is around 10 o'clock when I sit to have my dinner. Then I go to my own small room which is located by itself in the corner in the garden. The following morning I start again my same daily work routine. For me all days are the same, hard work and no rest, even Friday, which is a time of rest for everyone but is not a rest day for me. I work 7 days a week.

Hassan worked in this household for 4 years. His salary was initially Dh 400 a month, was increased in the second year to Dh 450 and for the last 2 years it has been Dh 500. Hassan expressed his genuine dissatisfaction with working as a domestic servant. He found himself exhausted, tired and lonely. He desperately wanted to change his job, or change the family he worked for in the hope of earning a better wage.

Hassan was interviewed again in 1998. He had succeeded in changing his job and for the last 6 years has been working as an office-boy for an American company in Abu Dhabi, earning Dh 1600 with one month's paid holiday a year and an annual return ticket to India. Hassan is well liked by the company because of his honesty and dedication to work. He likes his job very much, particularly because it allows him to visit his family every year, as he is now the father of three children. After 15 years of migrant life he has succeeded in building a house in his village, and his personal dream is now to get his children through college education.

Case 8: Habib, the Keralite Construction Worker

Habib is a small dark man, 21 years old when he came to the Emirates from Kerala, India in 1978. Habib was recruited with six other Keralites to work as labourers in the construction business in Abu Dhabi city. They were met at the airport and driven straight to the construction site. The following day they had a medical check up, and then went to the company offices where they were given papers in Arabic to sign. According to the contracts they were supposed to work from 7:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. 6 days a week for a monthly wage of Dh 500. They protested and explained to the office staff that back in India they had signed contracts stating that their salaries were Dh 800 a month. One company official began shouting at them, 'Forget about India, you are in the UAE now'. Then a Keralite, Osman, who had worked in the company for many years, explained in Malayam that the contracts they had signed in India were only a formality required to facilitate their migration. He advised them to accept the conditions in the new UAE contracts and suggested that at the completion of the project they could perhaps renegotiate their salaries or move and find work elsewhere.

Osman even volunteered to offer his own help in this regard and to get a release from the company free of charge. Because they had encountered so many problems and paid so much to get to the UAE they found themselves with no choice but to accept the company's offer and sign the contract with less salary and also less paid leave, only 28 days every 2 years.

Habib has been working in the UAE for the last 20 years. He is now 41 and considers his migration a success. He explained:

After working for 2 years with the construction company, I found myself another job as caretaker in the Ministry of Defence for a monthly salary of Dh 800. Although Osman kept his promise and helped me get a free release from the construction company, I had to pay Dh 4000 to the man who got me this new job. Before I started work I went to Kerala for 1 month as my parents arranged for my marriage and then left my wife in the care of my parents. It was 2 years later that I saw her again and met my first child for the first time. All of my four children were born while I was away.

I worked for the Ministry of Defence for 10 years. My salary was Dh 1400 when my job was terminated in September 1991. Three months later I managed with the help of a friend to find a job in a big construction firm as a caretaker in the office. Although the working hours in the firm are longer than those in the Ministry of Defence and therefore I can't do any part-time work, my salary is much better, Dh 1600 a month plus 30 days paid leave every year with a return air ticket to Kerala. During these years I saved enough to build a beautiful bungalow, and send my children to a good school. I want all of my children to get college education. I have also helped my father with the dowries and the expenses of my two sisters' marriages. I have also kept some money aside for my two daughters' dowries.

In 1990 I secured a visa for my younger brother who came to work in Abu Dhabi. Together we decided to save some money and establish a small business in Kerala, a ready-made clothes shop which I will take care of when I permanently go to Kerala in 2 or 3 years time. Enough is enough. I have spent most if not all of my youth away, far from my family and want to spend the rest of my life with my family, and take good care of my wife and children.

Case 9: Mosa, the Indian Cook

We met Mosa in October 1998. He is a 50 year old Indian Moslem from Kerala. He has been in the UAE for 20 years, and came first to work as a cook in an Indian restaurant in Dubai, even though he had no previous experience of this type of work (in Kerala he worked as a helper in his father's small shop). He stayed in the Indian restaurant for 8 years, and then an opportunity came when he saw an advertisement for cooks in the army. He went for the interview to be tested in his cooking skills, and for the last 12 years he has been a cook in an Abu Dhabi army unit.

Mosa's family back in Kerala is large; he is the oldest among four brothers and four sisters. He is regarded as their father, particularly since the death of his father 4 years ago. He has one brother working in Abu Dhabi city with a salary of Dh 3200 a month. Mosa himself has five daughters and one son. They are all studying in school, though the eldest daughter will be getting married the

following year. Mosa was planning to return to Kerala early in 1999 to supervise her marriage arrangements.

When Mosa was first employed as a cook in the army he received a good salary of Dh 5000 a month. This enabled him to bring his family to live with him in the UAE. At that time he was paying only Dh 600 in rent for an old Arab-style house. Later the rent was increased to Dh 1000 a month. The government began in the early 1990s to reduce the salaries of foreign personnel in the army, and soldiers from Oman, Yemen and other employees from India and Pakistan saw their salaries reduced by more than one half. Mosa's salary is now Dh 1800 a month. In view of the serious reduction in his salary, Mosa opted to send his family to Kerala, where living expenses were much less. He now lives in the barracks with 500 soldiers. There are about 30 foreign migrant workers (Pakistanis, Indians and Egyptians) who perform services in the unit such as cooking, cleaning, etc.

Mosa has an older nephew who is working in a gold shop in Sharjah city, owned by a Lebanese who is in partnership with a national. This nephew earns Dh 900 a month. Recently a younger nephew of his, about 19 years old, managed to purchase a 2 year residency visa from a national in Ras Al-Khaimah emirate, for which he paid Dh 5000. He is registered on the visa as a cook, and regards his uncle Mosa as a father. The boy needs protection and help as he still has not found a job. In fact when we met Mosa he was on his way to see him.

Mosa's main concern now is to give economic security to his children. The fact that he had four daughters seemed to give him some worries. He explained:

Thanks to Allah, I have bought a small plot of land, and we also have already a family house. When I go back to Kerala I always buy a little gold for my girls so as to build for them their future dowry. Those who have many girls in our Indian society find themselves having many problems. Getting the girls married off is quite a costly business in India.

He does not see himself working in the UAE for more than 5 years, because of the steep reduction in his salary and the monotony of the job. He would like to change to another job if the opportunity availed itself. 'My dream now is to return to India and settle with my family, and see my children grow and get married. Perhaps after 4 years I will return for good, *Inshallah* (God willing). I am tired now, that is enough'. He repeated this twice as if he was talking to himself.

Analysis

Our attempt to delineate the dominant factors affecting the situations and strategies of copying and accommodation found among Gulf migrants is introduced by a small note. The cases presented here should be viewed as ethnographic windows through which we can look at migrants as part of scenes of global 'ethnoscapes'. They are like small mirrors moving within a wider kaleidoscope, reflecting both commonalities and diversities of the human experi-

ence as it pertains to migrants. Beyond seeing surface diversities depicted in the case studies, it is possible to identify common patterns which run across the migrants' situations. Since our aim is to offer an overview of the migrants' strategies of accommodation, our analytical discussion of each will of necessity be brief, but it is hoped that these comments will generate further research on this topic.

The ethnographic case-study material has to be contextualized within the broader conditions of the political economies of the labour-receiving as well as labour-sending countries. Their socio-economic conditions in turn need to be seen as encapsulated within the context of present global economic forces and world migration trends, noted by studies on international migration and globalization theorists such as Appadurai (1990), Robertson (1992), Spybey (1996), Featherstone (1990), Sklair (1995), Zolberg (1979), Sen (1981), Arnold and Shah (1986) and Griffin (1976).

The migration of labour to the Gulf has been closely tied in a number of ways to the oil boom, particularly since the early 1970s. These links include the acute shortage of labour in the thinly populated Gulf societies, the desire and urgency to achieve rapid modernization, the lack of technically qualified Gulf nationals, and the persistence among Gulf nationals of negative social attitudes towards female participation in the labour force. The oil boom increased the demand for labour, and the labour-sending countries have had strong incentives to alleviate their depressed economic conditions by encouraging their citizens to migrate for work and to remit significant portions of their earnings back home.

There are common push/pull factors entering into the migration process to the oil-rich countries. Depressed economic conditions, unstable politics and high population growth have negatively affected the lives of millions of people in neighbouring Arab countries like Jordan, Palestine, Syria, Yemen, Sudan, Somalia, Egypt, and others in North Africa. Similar conditions are prevalent in many Asian countries east of the Gulf, such as Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and the Philippines.

Furthermore, during the 1970s and 1980s the rapidly modernizing Gulf societies were presented to the outside world as living a life of affluent consumerism. Their cities appeared through world-wide media as desert oases of unlimited good where the flow of oil wealth, nicknamed the 'black gold', created a good life in long-awaited eldorado cities and make available abundant work opportunities (Khalaf, 1992).

The force of these push/pull economic factors is best illustrated by a brief glance at the striking income differentials between the Gulf countries and their poor neighbours. For example, Sri Lankan housemaids, labourers and cooks can obtain 12 times their local wages in the Gulf. An Egyptian school teacher who earned around US \$700 a year in the early 1980s in his own town was able to save at least \$12,000 a year while teaching in Saudi Arabia or other Gulf States. Similarly unskilled Egyptian or Indian farm labourers could earn more in the Gulf than perhaps one of their cabinet ministers back home (Owen, 1985, p. 4).

The media-constructed image of the Gulf is reinforced by narratives of

returning migrants. 'Go Gulf young man! Go Gulf' still echoes in the heads of young men and women living throughout Asia and the Middle East. One Keralite migrant expressed this well:

The great wealth brought by the 'Gulf people' changed the face of my village beyond recognition. Modern houses have been built, beautiful villas have replaced the old mud huts ... You see, all of these people were like us, just as poor as we are, but suddenly they became very rich just because one or two of the family went to the Gulf. They replaced their old houses which were not so much different from ours with two storey villas fully equipped with electricity and water supplies ... Their children went to private school and some of them even had cars. Everybody in the village envied them and talked about how lucky these people were to have gone to the Gulf. The Gulf became the dreamland for those who did not have the same good fortune. My family wanted to send me to the Gulf. If our neighbours could do it, we also could do it. (Alkobaisi, 1992, pp. 207–208).

After these introductory notes on the forces which drive individuals to migrate to the Gulf, we now turn our attention to the strategies of coping and modes of accommodation that migrants employ in their work and life in the host Gulf countries. For our purposes here a strategy refers to a plan involving a set of actions, options or behavioural orientations used creatively by actors to realize a goal. A strategy manifests itself along three complementary dimensions: time horizon, intentionality and reflectedness, and these dimensions are exhibited in different degrees in the various strategies used by migrants.

Migration itself is a strategy used by families and/or individuals to alleviate poor economic conditions at home. The majority of migrants to the UAE, particularly the Asians, initially intend to stay for a period 3–5 years, but at the end of this period they find that they have either not met their initial expenses, or not saved sufficient to realize their ambitions. Moreover, the thought of returning home without fulfilling their expectations make them fear being labelled as failures, particularly when there are already migrant success stories in the community. Therefore, at this stage they often decide to extend their stay for as long as possible, by resorting to short-term purpose oriented strategies such as purchasing residence visas, appealing to religious and moral sentiments of the nationals, as well as utilizing assistance from relatives and friends (Alkobaisi, 1992).

Reflectedness as a dimension of strategy is manifested in the migrants' frequent discussion and analysis of their situation with other fellow migrants. The achievements of migrants are also assessed and reflected on during visits to the home community. Such reflections often reshape the migrant's plans to improve his situation through expanding his adaptational repertoire in a system that otherwise places him under numerous constraints. The creative use of situational tactics and flexible coping strategies provide the migrant with greater adjustment abilities, thus enhancing his long-term survival prospects (Conquer-good, 1992). Our ethnographic material shows that coping strategies and adaptation are mutually interdependent. A coping strategy refers to the re-

arrangement of resources and behaviour to deal with a given short-term situation or problem so as to give the migrant, as an actor, a better chance of accommodation and adaptation. Adaptation, however, is a generalized condition which empowers migrants to realize their long-term survival goals in the host countries.

These strategies of coping and modes of accommodation used by migrants can be identified as shown in the following sections.

(1) Using Debt as a Strategy

The force to migrate to the Gulf to better one's life explains why migrants are prepared to labour hard and put themselves in debt in order to secure work permits or contracts for employment in the Gulf, either through organized labour-exporting agencies or other personalized ways. Putting oneself in debt during the initial phase seems to be a common strategy for unskilled and semi-skilled workers. Most workers interviewed perceived migration as expensive—in addition to travel tickets, one needs a passport, visa and immigration clearances. Visas obtained through a local *kafeel* (sponsor) or labour agency are now more costly as migration has become commercialized.⁵ In most cases the costs of migration are met by borrowing from the extended kinship group.

Social debt is an equally recurrent aspect that migrant workers in the Gulf have to deal with in their communities of origin. Many migrants arrive in the Emirates having entrusted their wives and children to close relatives, thus initiating a social debt within the immediate kinship circle. The implications of such debts are often quite taxing on the migrant, as this means that the circle of dependents on his remittances becomes much wider. In addition to his own family of procreation, the migrant worker finds himself held hostage to extensive family-kinship type of obligations, leading to the creation of a debt syndrome and mutual dependence.

The process of securing visas and permits through personalized ways implies that the middle man, who is often a relative or close friend from the same community as the migrant, puts the person he has helped in social debt and a subordinate moral position. This social credit can be used in the future, often to help members of the middle man's own immediate family.

(2) Utilization of Kin and Friendship Ties

The migrant usually makes use of kin or friendship ties activated before arrival to assist in settling into the new country. The effective utilization of this strategy requires that one kinsman is already established as a bridgehead, and is capable of facilitating and supporting the migrant's adjustment. Usually kinship ties are personalized and sympathetic, and thus carry much needed multifaceted support

⁵ Even the selection process of school teachers to the different Gulf countries during the last few years has driven many teachers to resort to offering bribes to local education authorities in order to secure their selection. This came to the attention of one of the researchers when he was in his home town of Raqqa, Syria.

for the newcomer. Migrants rely primarily on the utilization of home-based kinship/friendship strategies, not only to initiate their migration but also to obtain jobs and settle in their work, and later to expand their adaptational repertoire as they seek to accrue greater personal benefits from their migration. The ethnographic material in this paper revolves primarily around this category of migrant.

Most of the case studies show the effectiveness of using kinship and friendship ties. Abdalla the land surveyor (Case 1) brought into the Emirates two brothers and four nephews. Mahmoud the Egyptian farm labourer (Case 2) succeeded in helping three of his brother to arrive in the Emirates as labourers before they moved into different employment. Even Nizar the shepherd (Case 6) was able to obtain a work visa for his brother back in Iran.

Our case studies illustrate that migrants should not only be viewed as wage earners, but also as potential middlemen to aid other kinsmen in future migrations. This role is not only a matter of helping relatives but also a source of additional income, as some charge their distant relatives for the help they offer. It is also a strategy for long-term investment in the sense of having anchors placed that could maintain future 'chain migration' within the family or larger kin groups.

Other studies have also indicated the role of kinship and friendship bonds in the total migration process. Litwak (1960) has noted the effectiveness of the extended family in supporting migration, in that they are more able to support the migration of other family members than the nuclear family or individuals. The first migrant often sends home remittances to be used to enable other kin members to join him. It can be argued that the extended family as a socio-economic unit, personified as 'Homo economicus', redirects the behaviour of its members in order to maximize better opportunities for its general welfare, even when these opportunities lie as risk far away. In this sense, from the family's viewpoint, migration is itself a strategy.

However, it should be noted here that not all migrant workers arriving in the Gulf countries rely on such kinship-oriented strategies, and in this respect two other types of migrants can be identified. The first category refers to construction and industrial workers on temporary contracts and imported for specific projects. Members of this category are often single males, who arrive in large groups and are immediately housed in isolated work camps. More recently, single women for the growing clothing industry are treated in the same way. Their work duties, accommodation facilities and living patterns are arranged and structured by their companies. These migrants lead a segregated social life, isolated from the indigenous population. Upon completion of the contracted project they leave the country as one group in accordance with established regulations. The Korean, Chinese, Indian and Sri-Lankan organized workers fit into this category (Owen, 1985; Abu-Lughod, 1983, p. 229). Further description of this category lies beyond the scope of this paper, as such workers do not need to employ individualized and personalized strategies for coping.

The second category is represented by those migrants who are recruited

through labour agencies, or direct job applications and are received directly upon arrival by their prospective employers. Although their jobs and life patterns are somewhat structured, there is room for maneuverability within the wider society. This in turn enables them to seek more individualized choices regarding friends and location and type of housing.

(3) *'Wait and See' Phase as an Accommodating Strategy*

The acceptance of a 'wait and see' phase is commonly used by unskilled and semi-skilled workers, and operates in two ways. In the first the newcomer accepts the job that his kin has succeeded in securing for him, even though it may not pay well or be to his liking. Later the search continues to find a job with greater opportunities and benefits. In the second way the newcomer waits for an indeterminate period before he succeeds in finding a job to his liking.

The brothers of Mahmoud, the Egyptian farm labourer (Case 2), worked with him for a considerable time before they moved into different jobs in Dubai and Ras Al-Khaimah. Abdalla's brothers and nephews (Case 1) had to wait long periods; his brother Abdul Rahman spent 14 months without a job and another brother Ibrahim, even with a university degree in agriculture, had to wait a year. Ahmed the Syrian schoolteacher (Case 4) engaged in freelance jobs for several months before he obtained his teaching post. Hassan, the Indian house servant (Case 7), laboured under difficult conditions in the hope that he would be able to move to a better job. Golam the Patani (Case 5) carries on working in the contracting business while waiting for a reasonable *kafeel* to sponsor him.

The knowledge of poor economic conditions in the home country plus the prospect of finding a rewarding job enable the young migrants to have the capacity for endurance and persistence. These capacities coupled with hope, patience and a measure of religious fatalism as accommodation mechanisms help migrants survive the harshness of the initial phase.

The duration period between arrival and finding work has varied over the years. Finding a job was difficult prior to the early 1970s, and then it became much easier. Since 1985 the waiting time has become, comparatively speaking, much longer again. This is related to variations in the pace of modernization and development in the UAE over the last four decades. The boom in oil prices after the 1973 Arab-Israeli war produced a significant flow of petrodollars into the Gulf States, enabling the country to embark on extensive development programs. This decade of rapid modernization created employment opportunities in both the public and private sectors. Since the early 1980s there has been a steady decrease in construction activities, and a tightening of the regulations regarding labour (Al-Mansour, 1996).

(4) *Sharing and Bearing as a Strategy*

The 'wait and see' strategy towards finding employment is only possible because of the encompassing support provided by relatives or friends to the new

migrants. The cases presented reflect in detail the effectiveness of this coping mode of behaviour. In a study on unskilled and semi-skilled Keralites in Abu Dhabi, Alkobaisi similarly noted that the great majority (87.9%) of migrants who secured jobs after arrival were able to do so as a direct result of assistance from relatives or friends (1992, p. 254).

Brothers from an extended family, kinsman of the same lineage, distant relatives from the same village, friends from the same region, ethnicity and religious sects, and even migrants in the same trade or jobs provide support in varying forms and intensities to the new migrants until they are settled. Housing space gets shared to the point of overcrowding, food is prepared and shared collectively, information on prospective jobs is passed on, and nostalgic recollections of home are shared and relished. This ability to share is the predominant asset for coping with the psychological and economic pressures, costs and uncertainties of migration. Undoubtedly it also aids large numbers of migrants to succeed in their business life.

In comparison with Arab migrants in the Gulf, Asian migrants show a greater tendency to organize forms of cooperation and collective support among themselves, such as associations and funds through which help can be given to individual members at times of crisis. For example, the Patan taxi drivers in Abu Dhabi emirate established in the mid-1980s a cooperative fund to meet the cost of serious accidents, particularly where *diyya* (blood money) has to be paid to the family of a road accident victim. It is through such ethnic and trade funds that Afghani and Pakistani (Patan and Balosh) taxi drivers can survive the potential hazards of their trade.

Pakistani migrants have created in the various cities in the UAE a special fund to meet the extensive costs of transporting a body back to the home community for burial. Social clubs for expatriate ethnic and national communities, like the Goan, Keralite, Jordanian and Sudanese clubs, are used not only for recreation but also as centres for exchange of information on jobs and multiple forms of other support. These expatriate social clubs deserve further anthropological and empirical studies to assess their roles and functions for their community members.

Al-Mur (1997), an Emirati observer, commented on the phenomenon of mutual support among expatriates:

When I was working in one of the national banks in Dubai city I used to watch how the young Asian comes from his country possessing nothing, but each one of those new arriving Asians will find all encouragement and financial, moral as well as commercial support from his own (ethnic) group who control an area in the retail trade. Should he want, for example, to get into selling fabrics, then fabric retail shop keepers will come to his help. They have an informal organization, with regular meetings, and funds which everyone in the trade contributes to in order to help the newcomers to establish themselves in the UAE market and also to assist other traders who happen to face any financial problems or commercial pressures. If one of them falls down, then help arrives until he is able to stand on his own feet again. Because of their organization and wisdom they have transformed the members of their own groups into millionaires, and big traders

in our own country. They gave only crumbs to their own local *kafeels* (sponsors). Most of our nationals have remained government employees, with heavy borrowing from banks and living as dependents on the social security of the welfare state (p. 46).

The writer of these comments obviously has exaggerated the benefits expatriates earn by utilizing such strategies of mutual support. The statement also directs explicit criticism at the nationals' readiness to become seduced by the protective generosity of the welfare state, while forgetting about the economic potentials of the private sector which they, as the author claims, have abandoned to the foreign migrants.

Until the early 1990s the ratio of nationals employed in the private sector did not exceed 1% of the national total work force (Al-Faris, 1996, p. 92). However, Al-Mur's statements and Al-Faris's note shed only partial light on how this economic situation works in present day UAE. Large numbers of nationals in fact have private businesses in which they, as entrepreneurs and as *kafeels*, use expatriates as partners and as employees. Government jobs represent for many nationals a security anchorage, as it were, providing them with reasonably good salaries, welfare benefits and security of income.

What Arab migrants lack in terms of the establishment of organized funds and formal cooperation is substituted in their accommodation patterns by greater reliance on family solidarity and mutual family-oriented reciprocities. Among Arab migrants 'family nesting' or 'chain migration' is a widespread phenomenon, not only in the UAE but within the Gulf at large. In general Arab migrants in comparison with Asians get better jobs and salaries, thereby allowing their families to accompany them to the UAE, and this contributes to such 'family nesting', as illustrated by the cases of Abdalla and his brothers and nephews (Case 1), Abdul Razzaq and his brother the school teacher (Case 4), and Mahmoud the Egyptian farm labourer (Case 2).

(5) Changing Jobs as a Survival Strategy

Unlike professionals and highly skilled artisans, unskilled and semi-skilled migrant workers resort to changing jobs often as a way of coping and surviving in work environment conditions which are beyond their control. In his study of Keralites in Abu Dhabi city, Alkobaisi (1992, p. 262) found that the majority of migrants he investigated had had several jobs since coming to the UAE and some had changed the nature of their work. The reasons which trigger a search for a different job vary, including a quest for better pay or work conditions, completion of the company contract, exploitive treatment, and loss of job. Job changing often results in a loss of income for several weeks or months. Once again kinship and friendship ties are activated to secure a better advantage in the next situation. Cases 7 and 8 illustrate the workings of this adaptive strategy for the migrants.

The overall tendency among the unskilled and the semi-skilled is to try to move away from the private to the public state sector. Such a move has many

attractions, such as slightly better pay, improved work conditions, and prompt payment of salary, which can be a problem in the private sector.

(6) *Having a Second Job and/or Multiple Work Pursuits*

The dynamic capitalist market economy in the Gulf societies have given some migrants opportunities to have a second job; or simply to be engaged in multiple economic pursuits in order to enhance their earnings. This possibility is mostly limited to government employees who have shorter working hours (7.30 a.m. to 2.30 p.m. 5 days a week). In comparison the daily work pattern in the private sector extends in two shifts over the whole day, until 7.30 or 8.30 in the evening. There is, however, a 3 hour break midday given as an adaptive work arrangement to suit the hot climate.

We saw how, for example, Ahmad the Syrian school teacher (Case 4) was able to shuttle between his school job and private teaching, even though this was illegal. Many school teachers are involved in private lessons, which generates substantial additional income. Again when this avenue was closed for Ahmed, he became involved in the afternoon adult illiteracy eradication program. Abdalla and his brothers (Case 1) are also involved in rewarding side economic pursuits. Many Asian unskilled and low paid workers also try additional piece work in an *ad hoc* manner, such as car washing, gardening, house cleaning or porter services.

(7) *Downgrading in Types of Jobs*

One of the modes of coping used by migrants to adapt to the competitive multi-ethnic labour force is to accept 'downgrading' in types of jobs, accepting jobs that do not reflect their actual qualifications or training. Such jobs are often not in harmony with their professional perception of themselves and their original career plans. Downgrading is found primarily among professional and technical workers, and has been described for Egyptian technical specialists in some detail by Ibrahim (1982) in his book *The New Arab Social Order: A Study of the Social Impact of Oil Wealth*.

Downgrading is manifested in three main forms. First, professionals coming from well-developed institutions in their home countries take jobs in less developed institutions. Here the downgrading they experience is professional, not financial, and they miss the stimulating and career enhancing environment. Their experience is opposite that of professionals migrating from developing countries to the advanced industrial nations, where the new institution often helps the migrant to advance professionally.

The second form refers to accepting employment that does not require the qualifications or experience that the migrant possesses. The third form of downgrading manifests itself in the employee accepting serious reductions in his salary. This was most commonly found among unskilled and semi-skilled workers in our study. The increasing influx of migrant workers from the poorer

countries of Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and India is creating an impact on the wages of those already established in the UAE.

Accepting downgrading as a coping strategy can be understood only within the context of sharply differing economies of the poorer labour-sending countries and the oil-rich labour receiving countries. Pressing harsh economic conditions together with rapid increases in population have forced individual migrant workers not only to lower their expectations when seeking jobs but also to tolerate job dissatisfaction and social forms of alienation.

(8) Tolerating Crowded Housing Accommodation

The government policy of providing housing for its white-collar employees as part of the employment contract has solved the housing problem of a large segment of employees. However, housing remains a pressing issue for the majority of unskilled and semi-skilled migrant workers because of several factors: a general shortage of housing; a rapidly changing market, with progressive increases in rent; a large flow of immigrants since 1973; the landlords' freedom to increase rents as they deem suitable; a lack of legal protection for tenants (Alkobaisi, 1992, p. 335), and legal strictions for non-nationals to purchase land or property.

There are obvious variations in housing among the poorest migrants in the UAE, yet one can identify some dominant patterns. Many workers come to share a house or even a room in a house to the point of severe overcrowding. We saw houses in Dubai and Abu Dhabi where 50 to 60 migrants shared one house, averaging 6–10 persons per room. The residents of such housing are often single male Asian immigrants. The selection of co-residents follows criteria of nationality, ethnicity, religion, regional locality or origin in the same village or tribal kinship unity. Most often these houses are located in slum areas, or pockets of old residential neighbourhoods in downtown areas that are now badly dilapidated. Landlords are more interested in rent profits than in maintenance. Since the houses are rented unfurnished, the migrants furnish their rooms in a squatter-like fashion: simple basic floor living. Each brings in a thin foam mattress, pillow and blanket. Bunk beds are sometimes used to increase the sleeping area. Kitchen space is often not adequate, and showers and toilet facilities are also rudimentary. Often the residential arrangement does not fill minimal health and hygiene requirements which leads lodgers to spend minimal time in these rooms. Many prefer to use the parks or any shaded space for their mid-day siesta.

Over-crowded housing patterns are not only confined to the large cities, but are also found in camel and agricultural farms, though to a lesser degree. Overcrowded results from strategies directed to securing savings from low salaries. The greater number of people sharing a room, the less cost to each individual. On average a migrant worker pays about Dh 150–200 (US \$50) for such housing out of a salary of Dh 800–1000 per month.

Arab migrant workers resort to house sharing in a similar way. We have

examples of Abdalla and his extended family (Case 1), Ahmad and his brother, and later on his friends in Al-Ain (Case 4). What distinguishes the two categories of migrants is the extent of such sharing. The majority of Arab migrants earn better incomes, and therefore the houses they choose to live in are in better condition, and there are fewer people sharing.

(9) Construction of In-Group Identity

The living patterns of crowded and intense sharing of space, time and food may at times cause irritation and petty quarrels, yet in general it generates among migrant workers intensified forms of sociability. They produce empathy, sympathy and friendships, which in turn lead to certain social and moral support benefits. These provide the migrants of specific ethnicities, nationalities and cultures with a sense of social balance in globalized multi-ethnic socio-economic structures in which they are not only exploited but also marginalized. The positive functioning of these kin and residence-related social forms of bonding help in the construction of in-group identities as well as maintaining shared inner personal symbols and meanings among the migrants as identifiable ethnic and cultural groups. We observed on two occasions in a State run hospital in Al-Ain city how patients from these various ethnic groups are showered with social attention during the long visiting hours. Literally dozens of residence and work friends stream in and out with plastic bags filled with fruit, cakes and packaged juices; their visits last several hours everyday.

(10) Enduring Separation from Family Life as a Coping Strategy

For the great majority of married low-income migrants, having a wife and children in the host society is considered a liability, not an asset. Low-income migrants are often not allowed by law to bring in their dependents; an expatriate in the UAE has to have a total monthly salary of Dh 4000 before his application to bring his dependents will be considered. The low monthly salary, ranging for this category of worker between Dh 400 and 1500 (US \$110–400), coupled with the higher living costs in the UAE means there is no option but to leave families behind. This enables migrants to generate small yet adequate savings to support families back in their own socio-economic context.

In contrast the middle-income category of migrants, school teachers and other professionals, have the option of bringing in their families. Yet they also develop coping strategies to avoid high expenditure in a consumer culture. The case studies presented illustrate this well. During the early years of settling into the UAE, dependents are kept behind for long time periods. When conditions change, such as a salary cut, migrants do not hesitate to send their dependents back home, as in the case of the Indian cook (Case 9). Ahmad and his brother (Case 4) have survived all their work years in the UAE without their families. Migrants of various types and income categories seem to have developed the capacity to endure the social and emotional alienation involved. For low income

migrants, trips back to their families are commonly infrequent, about once every 2 to 3 years. Many miss on knowing their own children and seeing them grow up.

Low and middle income migrants therefore lead simple non-consumption-oriented lives in order to maximize their savings. Their personal dreams are often related to economic security and manifest themselves in regular remittances sent home and investment in small business projects like purchase of agricultural land, or building a family house, or opening a small grocery store, etc. The combined effect of these strategies help migrants to save well. According to our interviews with scores of low-income migrant workers, they in general can save up to 70% of their monthly income.

(11) Negotiating One's Position vis-à-vis the Local Sponsor (Kafeel)

Numerous writers on the topic (Ibrahim, 1982; Farjani, 1983; Khalaf, 1992; Ghobash, 1986; Owen, 1985; Alkobaisi, 1992) have noted the insecurity under which migrants to the Gulf live. This insecurity stems from a large number of conditions, such as: (a) the absence of clearly defined rights for the migrants; (b) dependence on the goodwill of individual or institutional sponsors; (c) little access to the privileges enjoyed by the nationals, for example social security benefits other than health care; (d) tremendous power in the hands of the initial sponsor, for example, the migrant cannot change jobs unless the sponsor agrees, and then only for certain categories of skilled and professional workers; (e) loss of residency once one loses his job, and punitive fines for overstaying without a visa; (f) the ability of the *kafeel* to hold the migrant's passport; (g) absence of trade/work unions for foreign migrants; (h) the swift deportation of illegal immigrants by the Ministry of the Interior; (i) restrictions on who can bring in dependents; (j) inability to own property, houses or real estate, or own businesses; (k) formal and informal forms of discrimination.

In view of a work environment characterized by feelings of insecurity and transience, migrants accommodate their behaviour toward the *kafeel* in a number of ways: working hard; the strategy of buying his sponsorship every year; getting a release to find employment elsewhere, preferably in the government sector; establishing a trustworthy relationship where the sponsor will then help the migrant family; and holding an overall ambivalence towards his character and supervisory sponsorship role.

(12) The Migrant's Sense of his Social Status as a Behavioural Orientation for Accommodation

We use the term 'sense of status' as it conveys that perception of status is not a fixed notation which compels people to behave in certain ways. The fact that migrant workers negotiate themselves across a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural social landscape means that they operate socially and culturally with a sense of status rather than prescribed structured status. This allows migrants of all types to view themselves in comparative situations and manage their interactions in strategic

ways (Goffman, 1978). There are many cultural, religious, linguistic and ethnic variables at work in the daily construction of status differentiation and presentation of self, aimed at safeguarding their interests. Indian semi-skilled workers expect an Arab counterpart to have a higher salary simply because he is an Arab, which implicitly puts him closer to the nationals on the scale of status and economic differentiation. While Indians, Bangladeshi and Sri Lankans use polite manners as a generalized approach to ensuring their acceptance, the Egyptians resort to the use of verbal niceties and situationally controlled politeness to appease those actors around them who hold greater status and social/professional power. The Syrians from the tribal communities of the Euphrates wear the same kind of clothes as the nationals and are skilled in using the social tribal graces which are still given respect. The Pakistanis and Afghanis often project the Islamic religious side in their presentation of self, in order to minimize social distance with the nationals in particular. There exists a complex multi-ethnic stage set upon which actors project their own status and utilize their own sense of identity in strategic terms to enhance acceptability and bolster the economic roles they perform, thus diffusing conflict situations and safeguarding their opportunities.

Conclusion

A number of points need to be clarified further as concluding notes for this paper. The first relates to the inherent paradox found within the globalized world that is being created across national and ethnic boundaries. As a process globalization is creating a global village, but this village, as many observers note, 'is not an egalitarian one' (Hannerz, 1991, p. 107). While this is true, globalization, and herein lies the paradox, is also creating more opportunities for individuals across many nations and communities. Naisbitt describes this in optimistic terms, 'the greater the global whole, the more opportunities there are for the individual' (1995, p. 17). The cases we viewed in this paper showed the two dialectical faces of this paradox. All the migrants now work and live under non-egalitarian conditions, yet it is they who made their own journeys to this global world because they saw and still see opportunities for them lying there to be exploited, and dreams to be realized.

The second point revolves around the question of exploitation of the majority of migrant workers in the host countries as evidenced in the UAE cases. It has been said that the Gulf countries are blessed twice, once with the oil pipeline, and then with the migrant pipeline—the cheap labour drawn from poor neighbouring Asian and Arab countries (Arnold and Shah, 1986). It is relevant to note that in this context the policy found in the UAE in favour of Asian migrants is mitigated by their greater competing numbers and their vulnerability to be exploited.⁶ Ghobash (1986, pp. 138–142), an Emirati sociologist, has accounted

⁶ With reference to the Gulf situation, Birks and Sinclair (1980) have noted that Asian migrants from India and Pakistan accounted for 65 and 63.2%, respectively. Secombe (1983) has noted the historical roots of this migration process from the Indian sub-continent to the Gulf as early as 1935, and pointed out its connections with the British colonial power of the day.

for this preferential policy: (a) Asian labour force is viewed as more skilled than the Arab one; (b) Asians accept lower wages and salaries; (c) they are prepared to live and work in harsh conditions; (d) they are characterized by being obedient and easy to manage; (e) Gulf countries including the UAE have been following in their labour recruitment the dictates and mechanisms of capitalist free market, where cheaper labour translates into greater profit for the national, as well as other non-Emirati businessmen, such as the entrepreneurial Indian and Arabs. Therefore, the preferential recruitment of Asians is a general economic policy consistent with the overall workings of the free market in this particular region.

The third point relates to the insecurity syndrome under which all types of migrants live. As considered in this paper, there are multiple factors, economic, political, legal and cultural which generate among migrants feelings of being constantly threatened. This generalized insecurity syndrome, 'this annual ritual of suspense and pain' as one teacher described, reinforces the conditions which facilitate the workers' economic exploitation. In other words the various aspects of insecurity, including the primary economic one, drive the migrants to become vulnerable and accept exploitation by more privileged and powerful groups, which in the final analysis relegates them, in Appadurai's words, 'to lower class sectors and spaces' (1990, p. 301).

The fourth point relates to the combined patterns of accommodation and adjustment behaviour migrants utilize in the face of socio-economic and political conditions which lie beyond their control. The numerous strategies and modes of adaptation produce a large repertoire of adaptive choices needed for survival. Despite some variations, this repertoire appears to be shared by both Arab and Asian migrants, with the commonalities of accommodation patterns outweighing the differences.

The fifth point relates to the fact that our choice of 'accommodation' as a conceptual term is relevant in describing the various strategies and modes found at work between the migrants and the host society. In contrast the concept of assimilation is irrelevant and carries no analytical value for the socio-economic and politico-cultural particularities of the Gulf societal context. Foreign migrants, particularly those constituting in Rex's (1990) terms an underclass, are legally constrained and disempowered. The fact is that politics and culture of exclusion toward migrants in general prevail in the Gulf societies (Al-Najjar, 1994), including the UAE. For the migrants in this paper accommodation and adjustment and not assimilation are the viable options for maintaining their opportunities to survive in the Gulf countries.

The final point relates to a humanistic paradox in the migrant's life. We can infer from the multiple voices of our migrants in this study that migration is their 'exile' and 'refuge' at one and the same time. This is a philosophical irony which depicts in dialectical terms the human condition in which migrants live. Exile in sociological and philosophical terms refers, among other things, to the alienation of man. We noted in our inquiry the existence of economic, social and emotional forms of alienation among migrants, particularly those who occupied an underclass position in the UAE social system. We also described the various

conditions which generate such feelings of alienation. However, while conscious of this undesirable state of existence in the host society, the migrants labour hard to create support strategies and social bonds with similar migrants, not only to accommodate and cope with work conditions, but also to overcome alienation to some extent and create a sense of 'refuge' which provides them with life opportunities denied back home.

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