

Chapter 5

Tujjar in the Gulf: Changes in Political Influence



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Abstract Since the oil boom in the 1970s, the Gulf region has witnessed tremendous growth. Today, the GCC countries have an impressive collective 85% urbanization. This paper argues that merchant-ruler relations and the transnational dynamism of the Gulf played crucial roles in the traditional development and evolution of urban cities in the GCC. It argues that pivoting to a Western-European city concept devoid of an appreciation of the GCC's transnational dimension and the region's perennial structural need for migrant labor is imprudent. This chapter aims to fill the existing gap in the literature and urges the GCC countries to increase local participation to offset an observed Orientalist approach to Gulf urbanism. Thus, making the case for the creation of sustainable city concepts that appreciate the transnational nature of the Gulf region.

Keywords Gulf merchants · *Tujjar* · Merchant-ruler relations · Gulf pre-oil history

5.1 Introduction

Over the past few decades, the Gulf region has experienced unprecedented degrees of development. With a tech-savvy new generation, an array of massive infrastructure projects, and urbanization surpassing the global average, the region is one to watch. Since the 1970s oil boom, tremendous growth has unraveled in the region (The World Bank, 2021). The member countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council today boast of a collective 85% urbanization. This is further projected to rise to an impressive 90% by 2050 (PwC, 2016). Since the onset of the twenty-first century, Gulf states have been increasingly moving in the direction of economic diversification and making large investments beyond the oil industry. Much emphasis has also been made concerning sustainability and modernity. There is, thus, a need to analyze the growing importance and trends of sustainable contemporary urbanism

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and identify how it could be achieved in compliance with multi-faceted international concerns.

The main argument of this research paper is that merchant-ruler relations and the transnational dynamism of the Gulf were crucial in the traditional development and evolution of urban cities in the GCC. Thus, these factors must not be overlooked in theoretical discussions of the Gulf's urban designs. It also argues that pivoting to a Western-European city concept without an appreciation of the GCC's transnational dimension and the region's perennial structural need for migrant labor is imprudent.

The research raises certain questions in this respect. Is it possible to create resilient, inclusive, and sustainable smart city concepts without understanding the GCC's transnational nature? Why do contemporary planning and design strategies lack socio-cultural sensitivity? Can a balance be found between the GCC's workforce nationalization policies, migrant rights, and an inclusive smart city concept in the GCC? The research paper aims to fill the existing observed gap in the literature and urge the GCC countries to engage more localized strategists and planners to offset an Orientalist approach to Gulf urbanism and create truly sustainable city concepts that appreciate the transnational nature of the Gulf region.

The chapter is divided into five sections. The first section looks into the evolution of the cities of the GCC countries. It also appraises the discrepancies and inconsistencies in the conceptualization of Gulf cities. The second section looks into the transnational nature of the Gulf region and the role of the merchants, or *Tujjar* as they were called in the region. The third section studies the political clout of *Tujjar* through the case studies of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and the UAE. The fourth section identifies the aims and challenges in the pursuit of sustainable smart city concepts in the GCC. It highlights the importance of appreciation of pre-oil history in this regard. The last section makes propositions for the way forward through the identification, acknowledgment, and filling of the identified gap in the existing literature. It attempts to give due credit to the often overlooked, and recently (since the 1970s and 1980s) underplayed, transnational nature of the Gulf region. It discusses the importance of appreciating the region's transnational dimensionality for realistic, holistic, sustainable, inclusive city concepts in the GCC states.

5.2 The Evolution of the GCC Cities

Studies have attempted to trace the evolution in architecture and human settlement in the context of the location's particularity, environmental factors, and globalization. Issues of urbanism, globalization, cultural identity, environmental design, ecological sustainability, climate change, and architectural designs in the Gulf have been considered (Golzari & Fraser, 2013). However, there is a significant gap in the literature when it comes to the role and importance of the merchants, (particularly the pre-oil merchant classes) in the evolution of the cities of the GCC.

The top-notch smart city multi-mega projects in Dubai and Doha have piqued the interest of the international community. The global events by both cities—the ongoing 2020 World Expo in the UAE (which endured a setback due to the coronavirus pandemic) and the upcoming 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar—feature premium smart technologies such as air-conditioned football stadiums and driverless cars. Additionally, Qatar’s Lusail city and Abu Dhabi’s Masdar city initiative are both being developed to become smart cities (Mcsparren, 2014). Existing researches and studies critically examine the temporalities, spatiality, and phases of neoliberalism by studying the Gulf’s port cities. They situate the region’s smart city concept within a theoretical discussion that contours the relationship between neo-liberalization and urban areas, meanwhile identifying fault lines. They analyze diversification initiatives that aim at reducing dependency on hydrocarbon reserves and delineate the criteria of a “smart” city using the Masdar City as an example. A smart city utilizes existing information in the planning for optimum utilization of limited resources to ensure optimum efficiency, cost reduction, and better quality of life. It will also appraise intractable challenges such as climate change, limited budgets, and growing populations (Gharib et al., 2016).

Yet, there seem to exist inconsistencies between the master plans for development and the socio-economic, socio-cultural, and political dynamics of the Gulf region. Furthermore, the growing global emphasis on “sustainable urbanism” is landing the GCC states in a quandary regarding the environment (Zaidan & Abulibdeh, 2020). Recently, the state of Qatar reshuffled its ministry of municipality and environment to create a new ministry dedicated to the environment. A move the country wishes would be considered symbolic of their national commitment toward sustainable construction and development (Youssef, 2021).

The fact that most of the master plans are made by Westerners could be a causal factor for the discrepancies (Abulibdeh & Zaidah, 2021). Such discrepancies stem from developmental plans that reflect an Orientalist approach—a lack of understanding and appreciation regarding the historical transnational nature of the Gulf region—in making any such sustainable plan feasible. This is a gap in the existing pool of knowledge. Development policies are expected to be designed for the creation of resilient, inclusive, safe, and sustainable cities. The lack of affordable schools in Qatar, despite having such a large second-generation migrant population, reveals shortfalls in planning. An orientalist approach, which lacks appreciation of the historical transnational nature of the Gulf region, toward development policies will fail to capture the true essence and dimensionality of the region. Thus, leaving shortfalls in the creation of modern cities in the Gulf.

5.3 The Gulf's Transnational Dimension: The Role of *Tujjar*

The Gulf is the heart of modern trade and has been at the crossroads of religions, global trade, and cultures, historically. Allen James has provided substantial contributions to the history of Gulf cosmopolitanism by analyzing trans-cultural encounters. He concentrates on the role of change in society, culture, trade, and religion. His thesis is an appraisal of the Gulf as a catalyst for global encounters.

Despite overwhelming evidence regarding the Gulf's cosmopolitan nature since before the advent of oil, many scholars from the West display an attitude that the history of the GCC region is merely seventy to a hundred years old. This is a folly. The Gulf's long-standing transnational nature and existence as a global space with a high degree of dimensionality is a cornerstone in understanding and formulating city concepts in the region. The Gulf was never completely Persian, Arab, African, or Indian. But, with the politicization of national identities in the 1970s and 80s, multiculturalism and transnationalism are being underplayed. Before this, transnational elite culture was celebrated. People did not have to Arabize to gain acceptance or influence in society.

The emphasis on the Arab identity cannot do away with the history of transnationalism. The Gulf to date remains a transnational space; only the nature of transnationalism has changed. Previously, it used to be a melting pot of cultures; today, it is simply a mixing pot. Different cultures are welcomed, appreciated, and even celebrated. Arabs still mingle with various cultures through food, music, movies, and other forms of entertainment. However, there is a careful restraint and distance that is maintained from other cultures. They are careful not to allow the dilution of the Arab "*najdi*" culture and identity through the interaction with other cultures.

An easy example to understand this shift would be the regional attires. Before the 1970s and 1980s, elites of the GCC wore outfits that were a hybrid of the Arab *kandura* with an Indian or Persian headdress and spoke Farsi, Gujarati, or Hindi fluently. However, post-1980s, an Arab merchant elite would restrict himself to wearing a *Najdi shmagh*, *ghutra*, and to speaking only Arabic in public (Onley, 2004).

Understanding the Gulf as a global/cultural space remains in its embryonic stage (Fromherz, 2018). There is a lack of depth, detail, and dimension in the study of Gulf history. It is often reduced to superficial mentions of "*Ichthyophagi*" (the fish-eaters), the utilitarian tone of the Imperial powers' secret officers, and the current backdrop of economic or policy analysis studies in the context of Gulf security, terrorism, the "war on terror" narrative, and petrodollars. The lack of scholarly contributions on the rich social, cultural, and historical roots of the region is striking.

Appreciating the region's transnational dimensionality is crucial in creating modern global cities. Transnationalism in the Gulf was largely caused by the pre-oil *Tujjar* (merchants). Merchant families connected eastern Arabia to the rest of the world. Evidence for such trade networks in the Uruk' period (Algaze, 1989) and 6th millennium B.C. has been found (Oates, 1993). Heterogeneity, duality, cosmopolitanism, geographic fluidity, and blending of cultures were synonymous with the



Fig. 5.1 A hierarchical depiction of the three different classes of merchants (retail merchants, middlemen/medium-scale merchants, and elite merchants) as explained by Peterson (2016). The triangle also shows the relative volume of the respective class of merchants

pre-oil merchant elites. They practiced fishing, pearling, dhow, passenger trade, and agency work (Liendhardt, 2001). The characteristic extensive business networks that functioned as conglomerates across various countries and possession of substantial property holdings made them the wealthiest and most influential after the ruling elite (Fromherz, 2018) (Fig. 5.1).

During that period, Peterson argues, three distinct classes of merchants controlled the trade in Eastern Arabia: the retail merchants, pearl merchants, and wholesale merchants (Peterson, 2016). One could explain that the first class was the largest volume of merchants who were into retail and extracted small margins with trade. They were the least wealthy merchants and were primarily locals. Second, the group of merchants who were intermediaries and middlemen in the fishing and pearling sectors. They were fewer and wealthier than the previous category. Last, the scarce but ultra-wealthy wholesale merchants who owned dhows, pearling facilities, and the nomadic workforce. They were transnational conglomerates. Some also collected taxes and commissions from the public for the ruling class. Finance, real estate, and wholesale trading were also activities of this elite class of merchants.

5.4 The Political Clout of *Tujjar*: The Cases of Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Kuwait, and the UAE

Merchant-ruler ties have been crucial in the Gulf monarchies' development. Merchants participated in decision-making and gave insights regarding economic and political reforms through an informal quiet understanding. Their ties were bolstered through frequenting the regular councils (*majlis*) and through social institutions of marriage. This ensured informal but regular access to the rulers. Merchants' control over the mobile pearling and nomadic workforce through their ability to leave for friendlier ports worked as a check on the ruler's power. The movement of the workforce meant the lack of revenue, leading to the historic governing coalition of a quiet, informal understanding between the rulers and merchants in the region.

Eventually, the kinship, group identity, and the common tie of the production process led to the emergence of a strong, cohesive, self-conscious socio-economic class—the merchant class. Rulers’ financial dependence on the *tujjar* bolstered the merchant-ruler ties. The merchants and rulers had a unique mutual dependence, aimed at safeguarding mutual interests. The merchants made the money embedded in the sea accessible to the monarchs. Since the monarch was dependent on the merchants for money, the rulers ensured that the *tujjar*’s interests were preserved. Additionally, the importance of “kinship” among the regional tribes made the merchant elite the most “influential stratum of one’s blood kin,” making kinship “the language of power” (Fig. 5.2).

The merchants always enjoyed three choices—to remain loyal to the monarch, to voice out their concerns and interests, and to exit with their workers for friendlier ports (Hirschman, 1972, 1980). Merchants could arguably be the social class that was the most drastically affected by oil. The rulers became less accessible to the merchants. Post-oil, rentier incomes increased state autonomy, and the *tujjar* were made to take a step back from the realm of politics (Crystal, 1995).



Fig. 5.2 Determinants of Success of multi-generational business of the Gulf’s Merchant Families utilizing the factors compiled from Jaidah (2008)

The political clout of the merchant families also depended on the ability of the Gulf family businesses to survive across generations. Various factors such as succession, next-generation development, family harmony, governance, leadership, financial capital and liquidity, human capital, family norms vs. business values, loyalty to the business, loyalty to stewardship, outside advisors, ownership concentration, geometric growth, diversification, booming oil economy, protectionist policies, creation of venues, and transfer of ownership to companies in different combinations, causative manners, and sequences determined the fate of the merchant families of the Gulf (Jaidah, 2008).

Many authors and analysts tend to overemphasize and exaggerate a very personalized interpretation of Arabian Kingdoms' development spending. However, it is true that if the ruler does not want a merchant to benefit from the government, and the chances of the merchant prospering become slim. The non-cooperation from the government will lead to the others avoiding business deals with the merchant. On the other hand, the chances of a merchant winning contracts are heightened by lobbying the ruling family members. In Saudi Arabia, merchants have also acquired land, contracts, and favors by serving the monarchy (Field, 1984a, 1984b).

Despite the advent of oil, this relationship has not seen much change in Saudi Arabia. This is primarily since a formal administration was never actually built by King Abdel-Aziz. Trusted subjects, most often than not individuals from big merchant families, became advisors, secretaries, and administrators. This method of induction to the government has led to a group of bureaucrats who have no precedence of government careers in the European sense but have considerably served the monarchy well. Interestingly, in many cases, the King's servants accept salaries that are not particularly generous or a match to their status and lifestyles. However, they are enormously benefited by signing formal contracts and receiving business concessions and royal gifts.

Furthermore, as a result of princes entering into business, merchants began facing more competition and even corruption. In the case of Saudi Arabia, King Abdel-Aziz forbid the princes from trading. However, they did indirectly participate as mediators and in many cases received very high stipends or commissions. This caused distress among the merchant class. This policy changed during King Faisal's period. Since then, princes have more easily participated in trade. Today, some of the most successful Saudi businessmen and companies are members of the ruling family. Many still try to maintain a low-profile and have others representing them. Even today, government contracts are many at times viewed as royal favors (Field, Merchants and Rulers, 1984) (Field, 1984a, 1984b).

In Qatar, however, this wasn't the case. Qatar did not have a national market until the twentieth century. The small state lacked a cohesive merchant group. The merchants were weaker, depended on pearling, and had fewer economic options. This could also be attributed to the absence of an entrepot economy in Qatar. Interestingly, the pearl divers were uniquely free of debt-bondage; proof of the lesser control the merchants enjoyed over the workforce. The overall strength, political role, and bargaining capacity were much lesser for merchants in Qatar compared to other Gulf regions. This could be because, in Qatar, the merchants lacked a monopoly on

trade. The ruling family members were also merchants who actively participated in trade activities. In fact, during the interwar eco crises, World War II, depression, and plummeting of pearl industry due to the advent of the Japanese cultured pearls, pushed the Gulf region into unprecedented crises. The majority of Qatar's merchants left the country in search of more profitable options. Only two merchant families remained—Al Mani and Darwish (Crystal, 2011). Consequently, before the advent of oil, the country never had a thriving merchant class with a strong political clout.

Nevertheless, since the advent of oil, the business community is among the primary clients of the state of Qatar. Mehran Kamrava anchors the clientelist relationship in three main developments: first, the conceptual rather than actual nature of divisions between “state” and “business” owing to the commercial and familial links between Qatari merchants and top government officials; second, the strong role of the clan and tribal dynamics in shaping relations between merchants and the ruling Al-Thani family; and last, the multiple, overlapping, concentric clientelist networks that erode private sector's autonomy and bolster ties between businesses and the state (Kamrava, 2017).

Merchant-ruler ties are crucial in the Gulf's development. In Kuwait, merchants were a small, coherent, elite group with political power. They dominated public life. In the case of Kuwait, the interwar crises brought the merchants together. The merchants returned to long-distance trade and diversified their trade, which led to the development of the Shatt al-Arab in Iraq. Although the merchants were economically weakened by the crises, they remained in Kuwait, unlike the merchants in Qatar. The *tujjar*'s political and social cohesion grew as the merchants began to ally with ruling family dissidents.

When the gap between them and rulers increased, merchants formed an articulate politically organized merchant elite and created educational councils and political institutions (such as the Kuwait municipality). They also formed secret meeting groups and clubs to further their interests. Their activities led to a brief rebellion in 1921 and the Majlis Movement in 1938. The Kuwaiti merchant class became a well-organized and articulate political opposition to the ruling family. Thus, before the advent of oil, a politically organized conscious merchant elite class was formed in Kuwait. This group has been substantial in the socio-economic and political development of the country. Even in the post-oil era, the merchant elite enjoys substantial leverage over the Kuwaiti ruling family. Rentier state theory stipulates that the political relations between businessmen and the state are solely determined by the rental incomes. However, Kuwait's recent history paints a different picture. Many merchant families in Kuwait remain continuously active in parliamentary politics. Kuwait's merchant community still possesses the power to influence government decision-making and negotiate government distribution patterns (Nosova, 2016).

In a 2013 study, 83% of the interviewed individuals from merchant families asserted that some merchant families would oppose any issuance of “a Kuwaiti code of corporate governance.” They explain that such opposition comes from a minority who are beneficiaries of a fortune that has been built through manipulation. The interviewees also mentioned the existence of two types of merchants in Kuwait—first, those who had anticipated the 1977 Al-Manakh market crisis and called for radical

economic reforms in the public interest; and second, those who pursued self-interest, jeopardizing the interests of their stakeholders and investors, and amassed massive fortunes during the country's financial crises (Al-Buloushi, 2013).

This variation in Kuwait's case from the popular rentier understanding was explained by Anastasia Nosova by ascribing it to the semi-parliamentary political system. Rent-seeking, ties with the ruling family, ascriptive features, and the changing nature of Kuwait's political scenario were considered intervening variables (Nosova, 2016). In Kuwait, the merchant families remain integral to the state's unusual political and commercial fabric. The merchant class has played a positive role in the development of a flawed but somewhat democratic political system in Kuwait (Wigglesworth, 2011).

The culture of urbanization in Dubai was the brainchild of the former ruler Shaikh Maktum bin Hasher's pro-business policies (al-Sayegh, 1998). One can argue that he paved way for the recent economic diversification model of Dubai. Due to the geographical location, Dubai is a natural harbor with historical importance as a regional trading center. Dubai was always a cosmopolitan mercantile city-state. Although the concept of *Ayan* (local fishing and pearling merchants) being superior has existed, transnational and multinational merchants have traded freely, more or less on equal terms. Indian merchants controlled the financing sector, while Persians monopolized retail trading and foodstuffs. The strong trading traditions led to prosperity before oil.

Commerce was the primary source of income for the Dubai *Shaikhdom*. With the sole objective of promoting trade, Shaikh Maktum abolished customs and taxes. These initiatives were taken despite running the risk of being overly dependent on the merchants financially. Shaikh Maktum was willing to jeopardize his financial/economic security for the sake of his country's socio-economic development. His efforts created a sophisticated conscious mercantile community which became the driving force behind restructuring and implementing reforms (al-Sayegh, 1998), namely urban planning. The ruler's financial dependence on the merchants got the latter seats in the legislative councils and advisory boards. Unequivocally, merchants played a fundamental role in the development of Dubai in the pre-oil era.

From 1900 to 1929, two major developments intensified the role of native and foreign merchants in Dubai—the growth of pearl trade and the emergence of Dubai as the main port of the Trucial Coast in 1903. This increased the political clout of the merchants. Between 1929 and 1939, major economic changes such as economic depression and novel sources of income such as air travel and oil concessions bankrupt the merchant class. However, the decline in the influence and power of merchants was only temporary in Dubai. Merchants in UAE continue to play a crucial role in implementing and reformulating socio-political structures and economic affairs. One can thus argue that the Emirati decision to provide selective citizenship is only a natural progression, considering the region's transnational history. Citizenship is the relationship between a state and an individual wherein the individual owes allegiance to the state and in turn the state is entitled to the protection of the individual or citizen (Britannica, n.d.) (Table 5.1).

Table 5.1 Compiled by Author from data found in different sources

State	Pre-oil	Inter-war crises	Post-oil
Kuwait	Small coherent elite merchant group with political power	Merchants moved and developed Shatt al-Arab in Iraq Economically weakened but politically organized merchant elite Well-organized, articulate political opposition to the rulers	Substantial leverage over rulers Active in parliamentary politics Negotiate government distribution patterns
Saudi Arabia	Very close ties with rulers Rulers could make or break a merchant	Economic distress due to World War 1, Japanese cultured pearls, and economic depression	Princes entered the business Merchants were inducted into the government Government contracts are viewed as royal favors
Qatar	Lacked cohesive merchant class/group No entrepot economy	Merchants exited from Qatar. Only merchant families of Darwish and al-Mani remained in Qatar	The business community is the primary client of the state
UAE (in particular Dubai)	Strong cosmopolitan merchant class The role of native and foreign merchants increased due to the growth of pearl trade and Dubai becoming the main port of Trucial Coast in 1903	Bankrupt merchant class Economically affected but largely remained in UAE and received support from the government	The temporary decline of influence and power of merchants Continued crucial role in implementing and reformulating socio-political structure and economic affairs

5.5 Aims and Challenges: Why History Is Important

The aims of urbanization and city planning in the Gulf are said to be threefold. First, to provide for the growing populations. The Gulf’s population has swollen due to the expatriate workers. Qatar’s population jumped from 600,000 at the start of the millennium to over 2.9 million in 2020 (2021). In Kuwait and Bahrain, the respective populations have nearly doubled since 2000. Second, to diversify the generated incomes (2021). Saudi Arabia’s 2030 vision and Dubai Plan 2021 emphasize the importance of a multi-stakeholder approach. Third, to showcase the relatively newfound advancements, powers, and capabilities to the world. This is a matter of pride that is shared across the region.

Digital transformation and literacy become concerns due to the underutilization of the available e-commerce, m-government, and cloud services. In the 2020 Portulans Institute's Network Readiness Index, the GCC states did not boast high ranks: Saudi Arabia at #41, Qatar at #38, and UAE at #30. However, the GCC ranked much higher for skills and usage of information and communications technology (ICT): Saudi Arabia at #12, Qatar at #10, and UAE at #1; and for the level of access to ICT: Saudi Arabia ranks at #19, UAE at #10, and Qatar at #2. Today, Riyadh has emerged as the world leader of schools with internet access. A further top-down hurdle would be getting accustomed to the new-normal of decreasing oil incomes and reducing petro-chemical dependency, thus restraints on infrastructural projects' expenditure (Treeck, 2020).

Finding a balance between modernization and tradition is a challenge the Gulf region faces. GCC states are trying to resist the cultural influence of the West and other regions through the opening of heritage museums, replacement of Persian and Indian headdresses with the *Najdi shmagh* and *ghutrah*, and likewise (Potter, 2014). Nevertheless, this strife between globalization and tradition may unravel in the pursuit of ultra-modern cities. The connection between radicalization and rapid urbanization is an aspect familiar to historians who worked on Russia in the early twentieth century and Turkey in the 1970s (Frankopan, 2018). An accelerated unregulated change could prove unnerving.

5.6 Discussions and Conclusion: Identifying, Acknowledging, and Filling the Dearth

With 35 million expatriate workers living in the GCC states, it is no surprise that the GCC states are heavily dependent and reliant on the transitory migrant workforce (Karasapan, 2020). The number of foreign workers in the GCC is extraordinarily high. In Qatar, foreign workers comprise 88% of the population (Snoj, 2019). In UAE, this proportion is similar. In Saudi Arabia, it is 38.4% (Migrant Refugees, n.d.). In Kuwait, it is approximately 70% (2021) (World Population Review, 2021). In Oman, this dropped to 37% amid the pandemic (Expats, 2021). 52.6% of Bahrain's total population is comprised of non-Bahrainis (Worldometer, 2021).

Over the last decade, GCC states have become warier of this dependence and are implementing efforts and policies with the sole purpose of nationalizing their workforce. Through the latter, the GCC governments wish to rectify structural labor imbalances in their economies and societies. Concerns regarding social stability, high rates of citizen unemployment, workforce gender imbalance, and lack of education systems able to provide competencies required for employment are rife (Randeree, 2012).

Here, a fundamental issue in perception arises. The framework of GCC's labor nationalization policies aims to serve economic advantages and preserve the social

stability of the GCC states through the exclusion of migrants. Such an “exclusion” mentality is not sustainable. These policies reinforce the perception of immigrants being a non-integral and non-essential part of society—the unwanted “Others” (Alsahi, 2020). It undermines and ignores the historical transnational nature of the GCC.

Another question that requires addressing is how a balance can be obtained between the GCC countries’ urban city concepts, migrant rights, and workforce nationalization policies. This question, however, will set us on a different tangent and thus will not be addressed in this chapter. Nevertheless, pivoting to a Western city concept without appreciating the regional transnational dimension and the perennial structural need of the GCC for migrant labor is imprudent. Futuristic urban concepts must not ignore the Gulf’s historical urban and city fabric. The importance of local participatory planning systems must not be ignored.

Transnational merchants are yet to achieve their well-deserved place in the history of the Arabian Peninsula. The scarcity of written sources becomes the biggest concern regarding the availability of well-documented data (Segal, 2009). The review of the existing literature has revealed a substantial lack of appreciation for the Gulf’s traditional merchant-ruler relationships and the region’s historic transnational nature. This is also evident in the study, planning, structuring, and implementation of urbanization and GCC’s city concepts. The dearth causes deficiencies in innovative developmental plans which converge strategic planning, effective land use, and sensitivity toward the socio-cultural, transnational, economic layers of the Gulf states. Such insufficiencies will manifest hurdles.

GCC’s futuristic city concepts seem to aim for substantial minimization of migrant labor and maximization of workforce nationalization. The coronavirus crisis, the rising xenophobic anti-migrant sentiment (blaming migrants for the virus spread), and the acceleration of workforce nationalization have aggravated the precarious conditions of migrant workers. Migrant workers remain important contributors to the social and economic development of the GCC. They are central to the survival of certain economic and social sectors. GCC’s job localization policies do not completely address the GCC’s structural labor shortcomings. Replacing the entire migrant community is not sustainable. Once again, it undermines the transnational cosmopolitan nature of the Gulf region.

Thus, the way forward is to look behind.

Disregarding history is imprudence. History shows the occurrences and transition of changes and provides explanations and insights as to why the present changes and circumstances manifest. The Silk Roads, which connected regions like the Chinese empire to Central Asia, Europe, South Asia, the Middle East, and North Africa through multinational and transnational trade historically, were of utmost importance in the past. Its importance continues today. Chinese Premier Xi Jinping’s ambitious Belt Road Initiative, which aims to revive the Silk Roads, is proof. Historical knowledge, stability, prosperity, tolerance, and development go hand in hand.

Urbanization and urban concept existed in the Gulf long before the oil boom. The conquering of vast territories by the Arab armies in the seventh and eighth centuries created a new world order in the Middle East—one that combined the

lushest, richest, most sophisticated, and cosmopolitan parts spanning three continents. It became a honey pot for world merchants who wished to progress (Frankopan, 2015), thus commencing the existence of the Gulf region as a transnational space. Any regional futuristic urbanism must not ignore the region's historical urban and city concepts, largely conceptualized and developed by the pre-oil *tujjar*. Adopting an orientalist approach to urban planning and city concept in the Gulf monarchies is not wise. Rich innovative inclusive developmental plans that incorporate strategic planning, effective land use, economic structure, socio-cultural sensitivity, and appreciate historic transnational dimensions are crucial. Transnational intelligence regarding the Gulf region is necessary to develop an inclusive, sustainable, progressive modern urban concept in the GCC. Overlooking GCC's transnational dimension may prove detrimental in the long run.

This research paper provides an essential perspective and renewed appreciation for the role of the *Tujjar* in the development of the GCC states. The chapter provides a tabular description of the condition and activities of the merchant classes of the states of Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE during the pre-oil, interwar crisis, and post-oil periods. It is a comprehensive image of the state of affairs of the merchant communities during the above-mentioned periods.

This scholarly contribution will prove beneficial for academics, scholars, and students studying politics, culture, and society in the Gulf region. The paper can be utilized by those studying the Middle East, the Gulf region, anthropology, migration, and international relations. The two questions that were raised in the course of the paper "Why do contemporary planning and design strategies lack socio-cultural sensitivity?" and "Can a balance be found between the GCC's workforce nationalization policies, migrant rights, and an inclusive smart city concept in the GCC?" are individual research topics that have great potential. Such investigation could reveal multimodal facets that could provide reasons and direction for future research. The author hopes to study and investigate these themes in future publications.

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