



A Realm Without Rights

Noncitizen Workers and Exclusive Citizenship in the Gulf

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The substantive meaning of citizenship has undergone radical transformations throughout history. What ought to constitute citizenship is a political question. At its most basic level, however, is the idea that citizenship signals a form of belonging to a political collectivity. How that form of belonging is defined and who defines it differs in every case. Social, economic, legal, and even cultural forces may shape the particularities of citizenship, but the rights of citizens and citizens' obligations to the state or ruler are ultimately political. Therefore, since citizenship is defined by how humans act in a given polity, it is ultimately a *claim-making* concept. Namely, it is the right to claim rights.¹

Citizenship also delineates who has the right to claim rights and who does not. In other words, citizenship defines the parameters of inclusion—who belongs to a certain political community and the rights afforded to them. Yet the notion of inclusion is necessarily marked by *exclusion*. It determines who falls outside political structures and who does not “belong” to a political community. The series to which this report belongs, *Citizenship and Its Discontents*, investigates the limits and challenges of citizenship in the Middle East, focusing on political inclusion. Another perspective on the same issue, which this report takes on, is to shift our attention

to those who are altogether *excluded* from citizenship privileges and forms of belonging. Doing so helps us to fully understand the nature of citizenship regimes in the Middle East and how they serve to fragment society and preserve ruling-class power.

The Middle East is home to a significant number of noncitizens. These noncitizens include refugees and stateless populations—largely Palestinians, Syrians, Kurds, and the stateless “bidoon” people of Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates—and the millions of migrant workers in the Gulf, Lebanon, Jordan, and Israel. In fact, refugees, stateless populations, and migrant workers are often overlapping categories. This report specifically focuses on migrant workers because of their centrality to sustaining ruling-class power in many Middle Eastern countries, especially in the Gulf. While refugees and stateless peoples are significant populations in the Middle East, they are often treated by states as a problem to be “managed.” Migrant workers, on the other hand, are fundamental to the sociopolitical order and mode of capital accumulation. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, in particular, are home to an overwhelming majority of noncitizens, most of whom are migrant workers.² While noncitizen labor is a pertinent

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issue in many countries, the model of an economy run by a large migrant workforce, stripped of rights and tightly managed, is most pronounced in the Gulf, and therefore warrants particular attention. (For the purposes of this report, the terms “Gulf” and “GCC” will be used relatively interchangeably.)

In the GCC countries, noncitizens constitute nearly half of the entire population and account for the overwhelming majority of the populations in Qatar, the Emirates, and Kuwait. These workers generally occupy positions in construction, retail, domestic work, services, and manufacturing, constituting both low-paying and high-paying jobs. However, most migrant workers work in the private sector in low-paid work, whereas citizens tend to work in the public sector, which is often better paid and more stable. This report uses the terms “migrant workers” and “noncitizens” interchangeably, because immigration and labor are tightly intertwined in the Gulf. Issues related to work directly affect immigration and residency status and, simultaneously, the rights denied to noncitizens and their subsequent precarity also have a significant effect on the nature of working and living conditions in the Gulf. Thus, to better examine the prevailing exclusive citizenship regime in the GCC countries, it is important to pay attention to those who are excluded from the claim-making process altogether. This not only helps us understand the increasing inequalities *between* citizen and noncitizen populations. It also provides a framework to better grasp how such inequalities are generated *within* each population segment.

This report maps out the exclusive citizenship regimes that prevail in the GCC countries. It investigates how rulers of the Gulf have sustained their power by creating a noncitizen labor force that has almost no legal rights. It accomplishes this by drawing on the significant academic scholarship and journalistic work that examines the plight of migrant workers in the Gulf and the wider Middle East. Much existing literature examines the predicament of noncitizens in the Gulf—how they relate to the state, how they relate to their citizen counterparts, and their integration (or lack thereof) into the wider social fabric.³ But this report expands on these analyses, by considering the centrality of migrant workers

to the domestic and regional order. Rather than focusing on migrant workers simply as victims of employer or state abuse, this report examines how exclusive citizenship dynamics reproduce a highly differentiated, hierarchical, and unequal social order.

Although the status of noncitizens differs from country to country, citizenship regimes in the GCC countries share four fundamental features. First, noncitizens are denied paths to citizenship and lack social and political rights. Second, the residency of noncitizens is tied almost exclusively to their work. Third, citizenship is a vertical form of political belonging whereby citizenship privileges are determined largely by proximity to ruling-class power. Fourth, for certain citizens, citizenship is increasingly constituted by leveraging citizenship privileges over noncitizens. The effect of the exclusive citizenship regime in the Gulf is to fragment society, reproduce exploitative working conditions for migrant workers, generate inequalities between and within noncitizen and citizen populations, and limit political power to ruling elites. The suppression and dehumanization of noncitizens normalizes a set of practices that become the state’s standard way of operating on everyone, including citizens. By co-opting the citizen population into perpetrating and benefitting from discrimination, the state deflects challenges from citizens for rights for themselves.

Since a more democratic and inclusive Middle East necessitates alternate visions of citizenship, the rights of noncitizens need to be made central to any political platform. As the Gulf’s influence continues to grow over the rest of the Middle East, its model of disenfranchised, noncitizen labor has spread to many other Arab countries and Israel, contributing to deepening inequality and political authoritarianism. These exclusive citizenship regimes divide society, maintain a loyal citizenry, promote elite wealth accumulation, and contain political decision making to the very top echelons of society. Any successful efforts to address these pernicious trends and create more democratic and egalitarian societies must begin with extending rights to noncitizens—and they must do so in the Gulf, where the problem has taken on the most alarming proportions.

Recent History of Migration to the Gulf

Much of the prevailing analysis of the Gulf supposes that the discovery of oil ushered into being the culture we now associate with the region. However, a close read of Gulf history shows that the region has long been a polyglot, multicultural entrepot. It is a region that, well before the discovery of oil, was historically central to key trade routes, pearl and date cultivation, imperial rivalries, and religious power. Similarly, the history of migration to the Gulf is by no means simple or linear. Many of the present-day borders in the Gulf did not exist until the Uqair Convention of 1922, and official immigration, passports, or citizenship documents were not widespread until well into the twentieth century.⁴ Persians, South Asians, Africans, and Arabs, among others, had been coming to settle and move fluidly throughout the region for many years.⁵ Before modern times, a typical marketplace in the Gulf would be replete with Gujarati, Baluchi, Arabic, Swahili, and South Indian languages.⁶ A purely Arab or Persian town would often indicate its marginality to the region's integration into circuits of cultural, political, and commercial exchange. "The polyglot character of modern Gulf cities is the historical norm, not an effect of oil wealth pulling in cheap unskilled and expensive technical labor," Gulf historian David Commins notes.⁷

Notwithstanding this rich history, one cannot deny the geopolitical and economic importance of oil in shaping migration patterns to the Gulf. In the first oil boom of the 1930s, migration was primarily driven by British colonial officials and foreign oil companies.⁸ From 1950 to 1975, migration to the Gulf increased from the tens of thousands to around one million. Some were employed in the oil sector, but many were employed in the burgeoning public sector.⁹ The majority of these migrants were from other Arab countries. For example, in 1949, King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia stated a preference for citizens, then Palestinians, then Arabs, and then Muslims for work.¹⁰ In Kuwait, the rising tide of Arab nationalism also coincided with a preference for Arab labor. By 1975, 90 percent and 80 percent of expatriates in Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, respectively, were Arab.¹¹

The increase in Arab labor, however, brought along a strong political consciousness among workers deeply influenced by pan-Arabism, Nasserism, Marxism-Leninism, and socialism. In 1959, for example, activists and Palestinian exiles in Kuwait organized Palestinian workers in Kuwait at Ford, Mercedes, Fiat, Pepsi-Cola, the Kuwait Municipality, and the Ministry of Public Works.¹² A major labor strike at the Bahrain Petroleum Company in 1956 triggered a popular uprising that year, calling for liberal freedoms, nationalist demands, socioeconomic rights, and economic development, with women playing an important role in the organizing.¹³ Even Saudi Arabia and Qatar witnessed significant labor strikes in the oil sector, where workers demanded better living and wage conditions.¹⁴ The influx of Arab migrant workers, while necessary for development, undoubtedly posed a threat to the stability of ruling monarchies in the peninsula.

The 1970s, however, marked the beginning of a tectonic shift in the patterns of migrations to the Gulf. Following the 1973 and 1979 oil crises, the flow of petrodollars into the state coffers of oil-exporting countries skyrocketed. Mega-infrastructure projects and the establishment of a generous welfare state became fiscally possible. These projects necessitated an increased labor force. The political-economic conditions of the 1970s spurred the sharp turn toward importing a largely non-Arab labor force. Gulf rulers felt particularly threatened by non-Gulf Arabs bringing their families to settle; the circulation of pan-Arab nationalist ideas and labor strikes; the "Egyptianization" of local dialects and culture; and the influence of Palestinian politics on local politics.¹⁵ While workers from Arab countries such as Yemen, Egypt, and Palestine still continued to arrive to the Gulf, a new global labor supply opened up in South Asia and Southeast Asia, where labor was far cheaper than that of non-oil-exporting Arab countries. Asian governments began to enlist workers and place them in the Gulf by establishing efficient recruitment agencies that facilitated the smooth flow of manpower to the region.¹⁶ Moreover, South Asian and Southeast Asian workers did not bring their families, could not speak the language, and had no choice but to rely on their private sponsors or the state for guidance. This labor force was far less adept at navigating the contours of Gulf

societies, and could thus be better controlled, managed, and, ultimately, disposed of.

Asian laborers also complicated the forms of pan-Arab labor mobilizations that had been a staple of 1950s and 1960s oppositional politics in the Gulf. As the scholar John Chalcraft notes, “Asians had been largely excluded from the oppositional forces of the 1950s and 1960s, and thus such forces were acutely vulnerable to the greatly expanded presence of Asian labor thereafter.”¹⁷ Additionally, Saddam Hussein’s invasion of Kuwait in 1990 played a critical role in the shift from Arab to non-Arab labor. One and a half million Palestinians, Yemenis, Jordanians, Sudanese, and Iraqis were expelled from Gulf countries as a form of collective punishment for their respective governments’ support for Saddam Hussein’s actions.¹⁸ These workers were progressively replaced by Asian workers, and this substitution continued as the dominant demographic trend in the 1990s.¹⁹ By the turn of the century, noncitizen workers made up more than 50 percent of the total populations of Kuwait, Qatar, and the Emirates—the majority of whom came from Asian countries.²⁰ By 2010, citizens comprised just 10 percent of the population in Qatar and the Emirates.

In time, the historical contingencies of the Gulf hardened the divide between the local citizen population and the foreign migrant population. As sociologist Philippe Fargues notes, “decades of intense, but temporary, migration have resulted in citizens and nonnationals growing as two separate entities without a new, mixed, population emerging from their co-existence.”²¹ The effect has been an increased labor force without an expanded citizenry.

Political Economy and Sociology of Citizenship in the Gulf
The economies and states of the Gulf countries are constituted by a dependence on oil rents, albeit to varying degrees. In 2008, nearly 27 percent of the Emirates’ GDP came from oil rents, whereas in Kuwait, that figure was as high as 60 percent.²² The reliance on oil for fiscal revenues is even more stark. Qatar estimates that 76 percent of its total public revenue comes from its oil and gas sector; in Saudi Arabia, the figure is approximately 63 percent.²³

But while oil is central to the story of development in the Gulf, we must not fetishize the value of oil in explaining the historical trajectory of the region. Ultimately, oil is a commodity that is embedded in a set of globally determined social relations.²⁴ Similarly, the state is not a static actor, but “the set of institutional forms through which a ruling class relates to the rest of society,” as Bertell Ollman has written.²⁵ Rather than taking categories such as “oil” or “the state” for granted, a political economy analysis seeks to examine these unstable categories and understand how they structure and mediate social relationships and social classes. Therefore, in order to understand exclusive notions of citizenship in the Gulf, we must pay acute attention to how oil rents are distributed; how the state expresses ruling-class power; and most importantly, how a disciplined, noncitizen labor force is maintained and made central to the social order.

Distribution of Oil Rents and Competition among Citizens

One of the most important developments that emerged from increased oil revenues in the 1970s was the development of a welfare state for citizens in the Gulf. Although important differences exist between the various welfare states of Gulf countries, they do share some similar characteristics. As local citizens across the region came to view the massive influx of foreign workers in the 1970s as a threat to both the local workforce and national demography, the benefits of the newly created welfare state were extended only to citizens, and not to the growing number of foreign laborers who operated the national economy. These benefits include free education, healthcare, subsidized housing, and employment in the public sector. Additionally, other forms of distribution included land grants, import/export licenses, and state contracts. The establishment of a generous welfare state was both a compromise between ruling elites and oppositional politics, and a way to co-opt the political energies of social and political groups (merchants, Islamists, pan-Arabists, and labor organizations) that posed a threat to absolute monarchical rule.

The privileges of the welfare state, however, require a loyal and disciplined citizenry.²⁶ Groups often compete with one

another for closer proximity to ruling elites for a larger share of distributed rents. Ruling elites provide preferential treatment for members of certain tribal and religious collectives, to the detriment of others. Governmental decisions are made by a “tiny and essentially hereditary slither of the indigenous population.”²⁷ Elites also deploy various forms of repression and co-optation to manage political loyalties. Certain political opponents and dissidents are stripped of their citizenship, and therefore their subsequent rights, whereas important merchant families (who formed the traditional resistance to ruling families) are often co-opted through lucrative investment opportunities. Even the process of naturalization is characterized by conditions of loyalty to the ruling monarchical regimes. The Emirati interior minister, Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan, was quoted saying that “allegiance is a condition of naturalization” and “the constitution allows for the confiscation of citizenship from those who do not abide by its requisites.”²⁸

The Kuwaiti sociologist Noura Al-Falah explains the salience of loyalty and generosity via the primacy of distribution in the Gulf’s political economy. “Since the state has undertaken the important role of a ‘distributor’ of oil wealth among the native population thus, it immediately has defined the role of the individual as a ‘recipient,’” she writes. “Within the broad context of this asymmetrical power structure the individual stands in a position of ‘charity seeker,’ while the state’s role resembles that of a charitable man.”²⁹ In the absence of a productive economy with forward and backward linkages, citizen groups are structurally placed in competition with one another for a larger slice of the pie. State institutions and the public sector function as crucial mechanisms of surplus distribution to the citizen population, which is underpinned not by a rights-based framework, but one based on loyalty and proximity to ruling-class power. The effect is to ensure that power tends to remain in the hands of ruling classes and families, and not among a relatively privileged citizen population.

Additionally, as scholars such as Mary Ann Tetreault, Haya al-Mughni, and others have pointed out, citizenship is a highly gendered concept primarily concerned with ensuring the citizenship of legitimate offspring.³⁰ Throughout most of the

Middle East, citizenship can only be passed down by fathers, thereby reinforcing its patriarchal character. In Kuwait, for example, women are expected to fulfill their roles as both mothers and workers without full citizenship rights. Mothers working in the public sector do not receive child allowances if their husbands also work in the public sector. For those not working, they can claim rights to state resources only in the absence of male support. Kuwaiti women can also lose their status and rights if they marry non-Kuwaitis, such as access to education for their children, restrictions on housing loans, and housing allocation discrimination. Only in 2005 were Kuwaiti women granted the right to vote and run for office—a radically progressive measure in comparison to other Gulf states. Tetreault and Mughni pithily describe citizenship as turning the Kuwaiti woman into “a vessel for the transmission of nationality between men across generations rather than as a civil person in her own right.”³¹ This analysis can be extended to the wider Gulf region, as the lack of inclusive, universal political rights for citizens tends to exacerbate preexisting social inequalities, and, in this case, reinforces patriarchal values and norms.

Citizenship in the Gulf states thus proves to be a vertical form of political belonging constituted by competing yet overlapping groups of sects, regions, ethnicities, tribes, and interest groups. Preexisting inequalities and differences—especially gender disparities—are often entrenched rather than flattened. Whereas an inclusive notion of citizenship would begin with the right to claim rights, the sociological effect of these exclusive notions of citizenship is to preserve political power and decision-making processes for ruling elites while ensuring loyalty and obedience among the citizen population, and generating significant inequalities within them.

Dependence on Noncitizen Labor

The welfare state is a necessary but insufficient condition for the reproduction of concentrated political power in the Gulf countries. As noted earlier, the construction of infrastructure projects and welfare institutions, domestic work, and the overall development of the private sector in the Gulf is heavily dependent on noncitizen labor. As the

majority of citizens in the Gulf work in the public sector, the private sector is dominated by noncitizens. The citizen and noncitizen divide that constitutes Gulf society maps neatly onto labor market segmentation. Despite numerous government campaigns since the 1990s to hire nationals in the private sector, citizens rarely feel incentivized to work there due to low wages, unstable conditions, and lack of social mobility. Public sector work, on the other hand, enjoys higher pay, security, benefits, and improvements in work status. By institutionalizing this divide, ruling classes in the Gulf preemptively block collective forms of mobilization and socialization that may otherwise occur in mixed settings.

Moreover, this segmentation serves to benefit government control over society by cornering noncitizens into a private sector where political and social rights are extremely limited, while keeping citizens in public sector jobs that depend upon state resources. Neither providing taxes nor productive labor power, citizens in the public sector also lose their ability to demand active participation in political matters. Writing on this segmentation, Abdulhadi Khalaf argues that “the majority of the economically active population is excluded from politics, while citizens, who are a minority, would continue to rely on the ruling families to allocate the resources required to sustain citizenship privileges in highly competitive markets.”³² By relying on exclusive citizenship dynamics to structure the labor market, ruling elites in the Gulf are better equipped to isolate citizen groups from their noncitizen counterparts, fragment any forms of collective mobilization, and atomize citizens as passive recipients of state resources.

Exclusive and restrictive notions of citizenship also have a powerful impact on the lives of noncitizens. The turn toward importing non-Arab labor; the development of a petro-modernist state involving massive infrastructure projects; and the necessity of a private sector that can accommodate citizens and noncitizens suggest the importance of producing a labor force that is flexible, disciplined, permanently transient, and relatively divided.

To this effect, restrictive laws have been enforced by state institutions across all the Gulf countries. First, according to the governments of the Gulf countries, noncitizens residing in the Gulf are not migrants, but are in fact considered temporary contractual laborers.³³ This means that their residency in the Gulf is exclusively dependent on their work status. Significant disputes with their employers, who are also their sponsors, can result in the revoking of their employment contracts and, therefore, their residency status. For workers, the threat of deportation is a looming reality. Moreover, since work is tied to residency, there is much anxiety surrounding workers when contesting unpaid wages and abusive labor conditions. According to anthropologist Andrew Gardner, workers feel compelled to “stay in place, to endure the suffering at the hands of exploitative and abusive sponsors.” Or, they may “flee those scenarios in search of work as an illegal laborer.”³⁴ This dependence on their sponsors helps to explain migrants’ willingness to comply with the dictates of their employers. Although there are labor laws that enable foreign workers to sue their employers, since the employer and the sponsor are the same person, the worker is unable to work for anyone else and earn an income while the trial is pending. Even if workers do win their court case, the outcome may mean the end of their employment, and, in turn, their residency visa.³⁵ Second, the transfer of authority and regulation of residency and work status in the Gulf has gradually moved from the labor ministries to the ministries of the interior. The latter control domestic security forces, which means that the institution that oversees residency decisions also has the power to enforce those decisions without having to coordinate with separate government entities.³⁶ This arrangement suggests a high degree of centralized control by a single state security apparatus over matters related to legal status, employment contracts, residency, and naturalization processes.

In effect, citizenship—or rather its absence—becomes the whip by which capital and ruling elites ensure that a flexible, obedient, and permanently transient labor force is reproduced.

Generating Inequalities within Noncitizen Populations

The lack of social and political rights afforded to noncitizens also generates significant inequalities within noncitizen populations. As explained above, the modern welfare state that exists in Gulf states is strictly off-limits to noncitizens, bar some exceptions. Additionally, because residency status is tied directly to employment contracts, political and social rights are largely circumscribed by the ministries of the interior and workers' individual employer-sponsors. Lacking access to the resources provided by the welfare state and a modicum of social, political, and economic rights, the experience of noncitizens in the Gulf is mediated through other forms of identity, belonging, and resources—namely, nationality, class, gender, religion, and ethnicity.

These social inequalities and hierarchies come to form the basis of the unwritten rules through which state bureaucracies relate to their noncitizen populations. As the former Emirati permanent representative to the United Nations, Saud AlShamsi, explained, “due to differences in the nature, cultures and nationalities of expatriate workers, systems and regulations applied in the GCC countries for the recruitment of these workers are not uniform.”³⁷ Westerners often take higher paid jobs in the Gulf, where ruling elites consider them to have the “necessary expertise required to achieve global competitiveness and modernity.”³⁸ Given the history of ethno-racial structuring of society in the Gulf and a lack of equal rights for noncitizens—largely the legacy of labor stratification in American oil camps—Western expats are subsumed into a privileged position in the Gulf.³⁹ In this vein, anthropologist Ahmed Kanna describes, in his masterful work on Dubai, the process of labor migration to the Gulf as “a neocolonial hierarchy which privileges Europeans and North Americans.”⁴⁰ As many journalists and scholars have noted, there exist significant pay gaps for Asians and Arabs working the same professional jobs as Westerners. According to a 2013 Gulf Business salary survey, Asians earned 26 percent less than their Western counterparts in the same position in the GCC countries.⁴¹

South Asians, Southeast Asians, and Africans dominate lower-paid positions in construction, manufacturing, retail, and domestic work. These positions are almost completely racialized, and labor markets are often segmented and sorted by national origin. Hence, ethnic and national differences are often reified in the Gulf—economically, socially, culturally, and geographically. Anthropologist Bristol Rhys notes that some foreign communities in the Gulf actually reproduce socioeconomic hierarchies that prevail in their home countries. She argues that “labor policies and practices of the Emirates appear to have reinforced class divisions within migrant communities,” rather than building transnational solidarities based on the shared experience of migration and permanent transience.⁴²

The housing market in the Gulf exemplifies the persistent relationship between class and residency status for noncitizens. In 2018, the Emirates' cabinet passed a law that offers long-term visas to wealthy property investors who have invested more than \$1.4 million.⁴³ That same year, the cabinet also announced a five-year residency visa for non-Emiratis after retirement. To qualify, however, requires a property investment worth at least \$544,500, or savings of no less than \$272,250, or an active income of no less than \$5,435 per month.⁴⁴ In 2009, Qatar passed a measure that would issue temporary visas for property investors. However, the value of the property must be at least \$272,264, the owner must have at least \$2,700 in monthly income, and the visa must be renewed every six months at a cost of \$550.⁴⁵ While these measures are intended to attract more capital into real estate markets, these policies constitute a wider trend of further stratifying immigration policy and residency status along class lines. For the majority of noncitizens in the Gulf, these measures are of no benefit and their residency remains permanently linked to their work. For the minority of noncitizens who do enjoy extraordinary levels of wealth, these policies provide them with a greater degree of flexibility in navigating the contours of restrictive immigration dynamics in the Gulf.

Recruitment fees represent another mechanism through which inequalities are deepened through the process of labor migration. Under both international law, numerous

International Labour Organization conventions, and the laws of all six GCC countries, charging workers for their own recruitment is strictly illegal. In the Gulf, however, these practices are rarely enforced. According to a 2017 report on recruitment in the Gulf construction industry, contracting companies regularly lower their bids to clients by evading the costs of recruitments. As the report's authors argue, "for the mega-projects in the Gulf region, it is a fundamental feature of the industry that the lowest-paid and most vulnerable workers almost always bear the costs of their own recruitment, and then some."⁴⁶ These costs come in the form of rising costs of "demand letters," hospitality kickbacks, travel markups, and payments for nonlabor visas. Rather than the employer paying for these costs, they are regularly passed on to workers. For example, Bangladeshi migrant workers may pay upward of \$7,000 just to obtain a "free" visa to Saudi Arabia, even when their expected monthly salary may only be \$500.⁴⁷ The result is that migrant workers often incur heavy debt—often beyond what is expected—leaving them more vulnerable to abusive living and working conditions. On the other hand, employers usually bear the costs of paying recruitment fees for more highly skilled workers, which means that these costs are ultimately passed on to lower-skilled workers. Thus, one finding of the report's research in India is that "unskilled workers ... effectively subsidize the recruitment of higher-paid skilled workers."⁴⁸ As such, even the mechanics of labor migration—in the absence of universal rights—generate significant inequalities within the noncitizen population.

Securitization of Noncitizen Populations

The lack of an inclusive rights-based framework for noncitizens has also paved the way for the increasing securitization of migrant populations. The sheer magnitude of migration to the Gulf is commonly referred to by Gulf scholars, politicians, and commentators as a "demographic imbalance," and, more recently, as a "threat to national security."⁴⁹ The absence of strong political and social rights for migrant populations has created a vacuum that is being filled by local police departments enforcing immigration cases without due process.

In the Emirates, police studies have concluded that the demographic changes associated with guest workers has led to a "dilution" of the population and higher rates of crime. In Noora Lori's work on policing migrant populations in the Emirates, she concludes that the Dubai police reports "show how the first step in the institutional development of the security apparatus was to study specific criminal activities and link them to the presence of expatriates."⁵⁰ The security apparatus also spearheads initiatives to make migrant populations "legible" for the purposes of population management and preemption of potential crimes. For example, the federal government established the Emirates Identity Authority (EIDA), which seeks to create a comprehensive database that tracks residents' names, nationality, signature, gender, work visa status, health records, and criminal records.⁵¹ Using this data, the EIDA classifies the population into five different groups—one for citizens and four for noncitizens. The four groups for noncitizens are then categorized according to the type of employment and education level, which often corresponds to ethnicity and nationality. For example, in groups three and four (domestic workers, drivers, fishermen, taxi drivers, and construction workers), it is almost impossible to find Westerners or Arabs.⁵² Additionally, the government, in partnership with the Abu Dhabi police force, is building a universal DNA database for all its residents as a "security directive" that will bypass the legislative process.⁵³ Aside from tracing the lineages of potential Emirati citizens living outside the country and regrouping the population according to genetic lineage, the program will also "rank sections of the population based on security assessments of the likely threats" that individuals pose. In a procedure that seems pulled from a science fiction novel, lab technicians will swab the cheeks of residents, especially minors, "not only to solve but also to prevent crimes," according to Ahmed Marzooqi, the program's director.⁵⁴ Unsurprisingly, this national DNA database has been formed within the Emirati Ministry of Interior—the same ministry that has the power to enforce cases related to legal status, employment contracts, residency, and naturalization processes. In effect, the state views its migrant populations almost exclusively through the lens of policing—there is no intention of permanently weaving the migrant "thread" into the social fabric. As a result, Gulf

countries tend to lack institutions to effectively integrate foreign residents into host societies and provide education on cultural norms. In the absence of a comprehensive rights-based framework and friendly state institutions, the security apparatus penetrates social life either to police and manage moments of cultural transgressions or to preempt them entirely.

In sum, restrictive policies and the dearth of inclusive political, economic, and social rights not only harden the divide between the citizen and noncitizen population, they also generate significant inequalities *within* the noncitizen population. Lacking an inclusive, rights-based framework, noncitizens are forced to rely on their class, national, ethnic, and religious privileges to better traverse the precariousness of life in the Gulf. Not only does the absence of a robust rights-based framework exacerbate preexisting inequalities, it also further fragments and divides the migrant population into isolated units. Moreover, since ruling elites maintain policies that separate noncitizens from the local population, the security apparatus is left to police migrant communities by separating them into manageable units, often based on national origin.⁵⁵ The result is a noncitizen population that is fragmented along class, national, ethnic, and religious lines, where such differences are deepened through policing tactics.

Yet these technologies of control and surveillance are not confined to noncitizen populations. Throughout the Gulf, the security industry represents one of the largest sectors outside of oil, enjoying massive government investment every year. In the Emirates, the federal government allocates a significant portion of the budget to contracts for maintaining its security apparatus and adopting the latest surveillance technologies.⁵⁶ While noncitizens may function as a laboratory for the expanding security sector, the consequences of such surveillance technologies on citizens are clear. In 2017, Emirati human rights activist Ahmed Mansoor was detained by his government's authorities and sentenced to ten years in prison for comments made on social media.⁵⁷ In the same year, Emirati academic Nasser bin Ghaith was also jailed by his government for criticizing the regime of Abdel Fattah el-Sisi in Egypt. In Saudi Arabia,

Twitter users and women's rights activists have been jailed for their public position.⁵⁸ Although the specific reasons for surveillance may differ between citizens and noncitizens, the expanding securitization of noncitizens normalizes a set of practices that have deeply troubling implications for citizens as well.

Noncitizen-versus-Citizen Dynamics

Aside from examining how ruling elites relate to their citizen and noncitizen populations, any study of the exclusive citizenship regime in the Gulf must also pay attention to the direct, legal relationship between citizens and noncitizens. Doing so not only illuminates the exploitative, and sometimes contemptuous, relationship between citizens and noncitizens, but also sheds light on to how the prevailing exclusive citizenship regime in the GCC countries creates and reproduces such divisions.

The Kafala System

The most important structural institution through which noncitizens relate to their citizen counterparts in the Gulf is the "kafala" system. Although the historical origins of the "kafala" system are hotly debated in academic circles, there is little disagreement regarding its pervasiveness in structuring the experience of migrant workers in the contemporary Gulf.⁵⁹ The overwhelming majority of migrants in the Gulf are employed in the region through the kafala system—a form of sponsorship. The sponsor-employer ("kafeel") assumes full economic and social responsibility of the employee during the stated contract period.⁶⁰ Since the employer and sponsor are supposed to be the same person (although this is not what always happens in practice), the employee is not allowed to work for anyone else during the period stipulated in the contract. Doing so can result in the termination of the contract and subsequent deportation. Thus, the residency status of the employee and its ties to the sponsorship system are circumscribed by the profitability of the business or the goodwill of the employer. For the majority of migrant workers, immigration and labor are cast as two sides of the same coin.

What makes the kafala system important to the relationship between citizens and noncitizens is the fact that it is deeply personalized, facilitating various forms of extra-economic coercion. For example, private sponsor-citizens regularly hold onto the passports of their employees, restricting their freedom of movement. In December 2018, more than forty Indian construction workers were left stranded in Ajman, United Arab Emirates, without their passports, after their employer fled the country. They had not been paid and were each owed \$800–1,000. However, as the Indian consul Shri Vipul noted, “in cases where the company says it is unable to make payments, there is no option but to take the workers back to India.”⁶¹

Even though the kafala system is ultimately a product of state policy, one of its unique characteristics is that the state delegates to employer-citizens its authority over migrants’ entry into the country (and sometimes, their exit as well). As labor researcher Mohammed Ebrahim Dito notes, “this delegation acts to fuse the power of both the state and employers, with both spheres controlling the right of entry of the migrant into the Gulf.”⁶² Some scholars have suggested that this transfer of authority is a result of the state’s inability to deal with the sheer magnitude of migrant workers, whereas others argue that it is a form of “civic duty” and hospitality on the part of its citizen population.⁶³ Regardless of the exact cause, the kafala system has enabled Gulf rulers to subcontract their governing responsibilities to private citizens. Citizen-employers become deeply implicated in a relationship that would otherwise be confined to noncitizens and the sovereign host state.

This transfer of authority is also crucial in continually dispersing responsibility from the ruling elite and state institutions to the citizen population. Lacking inclusive rights and a centralized bureaucracy to enforce these rights, citizens ultimately perform the duties of would-be state bureaucrats. If noncitizen workers approach the official channels to resolve such issues, the state can deflect responsibility and argue that the matter must be dealt with privately between the employer and the employee. If the sponsor is not the employer, but an outsourced staffing agency, matters become even more complicated and legal

responsibility becomes very difficult to locate. Rather than acting as an enforcer of rights, the state merely mediates conflict—a conflict that stems from the state’s own policies. The result is that episodes like the forty workers stranded in Ajman, left unpaid and without their passports, are an all-too-common occurrence.

Kafala as “Citizenship Rents”

The exclusive citizenship regime in the Gulf that structures the kafala system also provides a powerful perk and source of unearned income, or rent, for a certain segment of the citizen population—what I term “citizenship rents.” The underlying premise in the kafala system is a differentiation between the rights of citizens and noncitizens. By entering into this contract, citizen-employers can leverage their citizenship privileges as a form of rent. According to Dito, this comes in two forms. In the first case, a sponsor will bring a migrant to run a commercial activity or business, often small in size (such as grocery shops, sweet shops, meat shops, restaurants). Even if the migrant worker operates the entire business, the “employee” pays a certain amount of money (often monthly) to the sponsor, in order to keep intact this arrangement—and, most importantly, their visas. Rather than selling their labor power or producing value themselves, citizens exercise their privileges to extract value from the labor of noncitizens, thereby engaging in rent-seeking activity.

The second case involves the trade of work permits, or “visa trading,” as a source of citizenship rents.⁶⁴ Although this source of rent does not define all relationships between citizens and noncitizens, we must not underestimate its importance in GCC economies. In Saudi Arabia, it is estimated that 70 percent of work visas were sold on this informal market.⁶⁵ In Kuwait, some activists estimate this market to be worth approximately \$3 billion—almost 5 percent of the country’s non-oil GDP.⁶⁶ In this case, an employee will pay their sponsor a regular amount of money, or a one-time lump sum, in exchange for a valid visa to enter the country. In some cases, sponsors can take up to 80 percent of workers’ salaries.⁶⁷ Once migrants in such arrangements enters the country, they can seek any job (illegally), as long as they keep paying

rent to their sponsor. If not, the sponsor can file a complaint that the employee is a “runaway;” the employee is thereby considered illegal. This arrangement is attractive to sponsors aiming to leverage their exclusive citizenship privileges as a source of citizenship rent, but it also means that employers can bypass recruitment fees and deny workers full rights, operating in an informal labor market.⁶⁸ Since the state does not effectively enforce social and economic rights in any comprehensive manner, citizen-sponsors and “labor brokers” are better positioned to exploit migrant workers for financial gain when workers seek to return home or transfer their sponsorship. According to Steffen Hertog, when the Emirates and Bahrain issued amnesties for illegal workers to leave the country without penalty, “many sponsors refused to return passports to workers unless they paid them back a year’s wage or more.”⁶⁹ Incidents like these suggest that the transfer of authority from state institutions to individual citizens increases the exploitative potential of rent-seeking activity. Since these workers are already considered illegal, citizen sponsors hold a much greater degree of bargaining power even though they are also participating in an illegal activity themselves.

Additionally, this exclusive citizenship privilege is, as noted previously, structured by citizens’ proximity to ruling-class power. Sponsors acquire more labor permits from the state than needed and then resell these permits on the informal market to employers who may actually need them. The largest brokers are those with privileged access to the labor bureaucracy, often ruling family members themselves.⁷⁰ This, again, suggests that proximity to ruling elites is a key condition in citizens gaining privileged access to material benefit. Rather than oil rents, in this case, citizens extract citizenship rents from their noncitizen counterparts by exercising their citizenship privileges.

While it is tempting to single out the kafala system as either an antiquated or inherently exploitative system, it is important to note that many countries share similar immigration policies (such as immigration tied to labor and the fear of deportation). What makes the kafala system different is the scale on which it operates, deeply affecting the majority of people residing in the GCC countries. However, it is

the absence of social, political, and economic rights, and the existence of an exclusive citizenship regime, that make the kafala system all the more vulnerable to considerable exploitation and parasitic rent seeking.

Gulf rulers’ delegation of authority over immigration to their citizen populations deepens the divide between citizens and noncitizens, generating considerable inequalities within each population. Citizens find themselves “ruling” over noncitizens, thereby creating the structural conditions that lay the basis for processes of depersonalization, racism, weak engagement with workers’ rights, and paranoia.⁷¹ Rather than seeing migrant workers as active agents who are part of the social fabric, the exclusive citizenship regime perpetuated by state institutions renders them merely sources of rent for a privileged citizen class. Thus, reforming or even abolishing the kafala system is not the fundamental solution to the problem. While it is crucial to radically rethink the kafala system, Dito argues that because of the system’s origins “within the rentier state mechanism, any substantive change requires the redefinition of citizenship and the subsequent reshaping of the relation between the state and its citizens.”⁷²

What is needed, therefore, is a restructuring of the entire patronage system that privileges some citizens over others, and for the state to implement and enforce inclusive social, political, and economic rights for its noncitizens. Doing so would help mitigate against the most egregious forms of extra-economic coercion on the part of labor brokers and sponsors, while producing the conditions for migrant workers to become active social, political, and economic agents in host societies.

Hyperalienation and Xenophobia

The same structural conditions that reduce migrant workers to sources of rent also lay the basis for widespread xenophobic and culturally alienating sentiment in Gulf societies. Without essentializing the nature of Gulf societies, we can better understand why racism pervades them and why citizens feel like strangers in their own countries by analyzing the ways in which migrants are integrated, or not.

Since the 1980s, citizens of Gulf societies have progressively lost their economic power, being pushed out of the private sector and other productive sectors of the economy, replaced with noncitizens. In a provocative thought-experiment, the Kuwait-based scholar Omar AlShehabi argues that “if all citizen-workers were to go on strike, the private sector would largely continue unabated.”⁷³ This loss of power, however, is not strictly economic. Many citizens complain of being “strangers in their own land,” demanding that the state take action against the “demographic imbalance.”⁷⁴ In 2008, the president of the Emirates and emir of Abu Dhabi, Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, inaugurated the “year of identity,” naming the “population imbalance” as a major threat in preserving the nation’s identity.⁷⁵ AlShehabi describes the widespread feelings of insecurity surrounding identity as a process of “hyperalienation.” According to the classic Marxist definition, alienation describes the process whereby workers confront the fruits of their labor as something foreign to them—producing not for themselves, but in order to obtain the very means of sustaining life. However, in a political economy where citizens have lost their economic power and are not alienated in the production process, they become alienated as consumers, simply dependent on state-distributed or privately generated rent. Lacking channels to partake in public decision-making processes, citizens perceive the “population imbalance” as the source of social and psychological ills and a threat to their language, identity, and culture. With the political arena closed for the majority of citizens, culture becomes the new form of political contestation. The same securitized logic of the state is reproduced at the level of citizens. Because migrant workers are not integrated into the social fabric, they are primarily perceived as economic actors or security threats who need to be managed and controlled. As such, being a citizen is “in many ways constituted by the rights afforded to the citizenry to exercise domination over migrant workers.”⁷⁶

Hyperalienation also manifests itself in the form of urbanization that actualizes citizenship divides in the built environment. AlShehabi describes hyperalienation as “a person’s lack of control and involvement in the production of their surrounding environment ... to the point where they feel the surrounding environment does not represent

them, and indeed is a source of oppression.”⁷⁷ Throughout the Gulf countries, large-scale real estate projects (built almost exclusively by migrant workers) form the new urban topographies; cities become increasingly divided along class and citizenship lines; and relationships between citizens and noncitizens are often transactional. In Bahrain, for example, wealthy expatriates reside in mega-real estate projects, middle- to lower-class migrant workers fill historic neighborhoods, and local citizens almost exclusively populate the suburbs. Not only are citizenship divides expressed through the kafala system, they manifest themselves in the built environment. As such, across the entire Gulf region, many citizens confront urban developments as “alien” and of little meaning to their lives. Even though these urban development projects are directed by ruling elites and capitalist classes (sometimes being one and the same), the effect of urbanization in the Gulf has been to further stratify the lived experience of its citizens along citizenship and class lines.

Alternative Trajectories and Solidarities

Much of this analysis has painted a rather bleak picture of life in the Gulf for the majority of its residents, namely its noncitizen population. This report has also argued that exclusive citizenship dynamics in the region have deepened inequalities within both populations and extended divisions between each population. That being said, there have been moments, however rare, of noncitizens and citizens resisting the exclusive citizenship regime in the Gulf.

Despite the enormous risks migrant workers face in contesting their exploitative living and working conditions, they have proved to be important political actors in their own right. In June 2014, two thousand garment factory workers went on strike, demanding better wages and working conditions.⁷⁸ The company they worked for, MRS Fashions, which provides clothing to corporations such as Walmart, Macy’s, Gap, and J. C. Penny, acquiesced to a small wage hike, but also deported some of the workers in the process. According to a report by the Institute for Global Labor and Human Rights, more than seventy garment workers from

Sri Lanka, India, and Bangladesh were “forcibly deported from the MRS Fashions sweatshop ... and cheated of their back wages.”⁷⁹ However, workers did gain a key concession through the strike: the retention of their passports. Although the practice of confiscating passports was already illegal, it often continued unenforced (and still does). In this case, however, collective action forced the company to make concessions to its workers while also restricting its tools of extra-economic coercion.

In May 2013, thousands of workers employed by Arabtec, an Emirates-based construction giant with close links to the ruling Emirati family, went on strike for four days, demanding that their monthly food allowance be paid in wages rather than in kind.⁸⁰ This strike was noteworthy because it was not confined to a single worksite. It involved workers across Dubai and Abu Dhabi, suggesting that a widespread mobilization campaign had taken place between various workers. Similar to the case in Bahrain, the police issued forty-three deportation orders to workers involved in the strike, and they were forced to return home.⁸¹ However, Arabtec conceded to the pressure of the strike and raised the salaries of thirty-six thousand workers by 20 percent in September of the same year.⁸² While Arabtec claims that this decision was made of its own accord, we cannot deny the impact of the strike and the ensuing media attention in forcing the company to make important concessions to its migrant workforce. Notwithstanding these limited victories, both cases demonstrate the high costs of collective actions in the GCC countries—namely, deportation.

While there have been numerous strikes and collective efforts on the part of migrant workers to contest exploitative working and living conditions, there has been a glaring absence of solidarity between citizen and noncitizen workers in the Gulf. If anything, this is a testament to the effectiveness of Gulf rulers’ strategies, rather than any essential animosity between Gulf Arabs and their migrant counterparts. That said, the region has witnessed a number of notable alliances that have transcended the citizenship boundary.

In 2010, a group of Filipino domestic workers built an organization where they could rely on each other for support

and assistance. By 2018, the group—now called Sandigan Kuwait Domestic Workers Federation (SKDWF)—grew to a membership base of five thousand, training volunteers and counselling workers.⁸³ Due to legal restrictions, however, the union focused mainly on charitable and social work, as opposed to workplace organizing and collective bargaining. Notwithstanding these restrictions, a labor coalition has emerged between the SKDWF and the Kuwait Trade Union Federation (KTUF), where the two unions have established workshops, trainings, and awareness-raising events regarding labor rights for migrant workers. The cooperation between the KTUF and the SKDWF suggests that there is a certain degree of government knowledge and acceptance.⁸⁴ The KTUF has structural features that are similar to other state institutions—it is funded by the government and partially incorporated into the Ministry of Social and Labor Affairs. Since most domestic workers in Kuwait are not covered by Kuwait’s labor codes, the fact that this project is taking place at the official level is even more startling. In 2012, the KTUF also signed an official agreement with the General Federation of Nepalese Trade Unions (GEFONT), which has resulted in a “sustained relationship between the two unions.”⁸⁵ The agreement seeks to abolish the sponsorship system for workers in Kuwait, while also monitoring the activities of recruitment agencies in Nepal, which are notorious for trapping migrant workers in webs of debt. As KTUF general secretary Abdulrahman Alghanim pointed out, “migrant workers pay huge sums to unscrupulous recruiters, sometimes leading to situations of debt bondage, whereas often fees have already been paid by Kuwaiti employers.”⁸⁶ The agreement also clearly states that the principles of international trade union solidarity, social justice, and equality must be applied to migrant workers by reaffirming their right to associate freely, to join trade unions, and “to find better ways to organise and defend rights and interests of migrant workers in Kuwait.”⁸⁷

But the small degree of official acquiescence to these partnerships should not be interpreted as the Kuwaiti ruling class’s desire to openly permit cooperation between its citizen and noncitizen workers. Rather, these projects indicate the internationalist bent of the KTUF, the pressure they have applied on the government, and “a significant

attempt by the KTUF to emphasize solidarity, rather than competition.”⁸⁸

Similarly, in October 2016, the General Federation of Bahrain Trade Unions (GFBTU), along with the Freidrich Ebert Stiftung and the International Domestic Workers Federation, launched a campaign to promote the rights of domestic workers across the region. In Bahrain, where domestic workers (workers in homes) compose approximately 15 percent of the workforce, they are excluded from existing labor laws and unable to change sponsors. As deputy secretary general Abdulqader Al-Shehabi noted during the two-day workshop, “unfortunately, the law prohibits checking homes to ensure domestic workers are treated well as some are being treated as a commodity.”⁸⁹ Following a year of advocacy campaigns, workshops, and lectures, Bahrain’s Labor Market Regulatory Authority announced that recruitment agencies in Bahrain must adopt a new contract for domestic workers.⁹⁰ Even though these regulations only partially incorporate domestic workers into Bahrain’s labor laws—excluding them from minimum wages, limits on working hours, and mandatory days off—the announcement is clearly a step in the right direction. While it is difficult to draw a direct link between the efforts the GFBTU and the decision to impose a new compulsory contract for domestic workers, the facts that both Bahraini and Kuwaiti trade unions have been working on these issues together and that their respective governments have made important concessions suggest that trade union pressure has been effective.

By advocating on behalf of migrant workers, cooperating with foreign trade unions, and providing resources for workshops and campaigns, trade unions in the Gulf have demonstrated that there are effective ways of bridging the citizenship gap in the region. Although these instances of solidarity are rare relative to the sheer number of migrant workers in the region, they nonetheless represent alternative trajectories that are critical to promoting the rights of noncitizens in the Gulf. These projects not only demonstrate that collective mobilization between citizens and noncitizens is necessary for building an inclusive society defined by new forms of belonging, they also challenge the limits of what is possible in the political landscape of the Gulf.

The Privileges of Citizenship

While inclusive rights and citizenship in the Middle East undergo a frontal attack under conditions of deepening corruption, war, sectarian fragmentation, and authoritarian rule, the GCC countries stand in contrast to the rest of the region in that the near majority of their residents are, a priori, excluded from citizenship rights altogether. As this report has demonstrated, the exclusive citizenship regime in the Gulf is constituted by four main features. First, noncitizens are almost universally denied any path to citizenship and, most importantly, lack robust political, social, and economic rights.⁹¹ Second, the residency status of noncitizens is exclusively tied to labor for the majority of this population. Third, for citizens, citizenship is a vertical form of political belonging, whereby citizenship privileges are largely determined by proximity to ruling-class power. Last, for some citizens in the Gulf, citizenship is increasingly constituted by leveraging their citizenship privileges over noncitizens. Not only are the majority of privileges accrued to citizens made materially possible by the maintenance of an excluded and rightless labor force, citizens can draw upon the structural imbalances of the kafala system as key sources of rent.

For noncitizens, the lack of social, political, and economic rights is a fundamental feature of the exclusive citizenship regime in the region. Many academics, journalists, and nongovernmental organizations have documented some of the most abusive and exploitative conditions that migrant workers face. This report, however, surveys the burgeoning scholarship on how Gulf rulers seek to maintain a disciplined and docile labor force in order to preserve social hierarchies and ruling-class power. Both the historical shift from Arab to Asian labor and a contemporary analysis of how residency status is tied almost exclusively to labor suggest the importance of maintaining a permanently transient labor force for Gulf rulers and capital. This system ensures the existence of a labor force that is required by Gulf rulers to sustain citizenship privileges for its citizen population, but it also excludes noncitizen migrant workers from social, political, and economic rights for the purposes of maintaining and extending ruling-class power. Gulf rulers and capital draw upon this labor force to build infrastructural

projects, real estate developments, and industry without facing significant opposition. In other words, labor migration to the Gulf does not occur despite the denial of rights to their labor force, but precisely because of it.

Not only do exclusive citizenship dynamics serve the interests of Gulf rulers, they also play a critical role in generating key inequalities within the noncitizen population. With the lack of any strong rights-based framework to rely on, coupled with the inability to claim rights in any meaningful way, noncitizens are left to draw upon other forms of identity such as class, nationality, ethnicity, religion, and gender, to navigate their lives in the Gulf. Additionally, the absence of universal rights also means that noncitizens are excluded from the social fabric, and thus are the objects of policing tactics and security management. As such, preexisting inequalities are deepened and processes of social fragmentation are intensified.

Citizens, on the other hand, enjoy a radically different relationship with their rulers and prevailing state institutions. This, however, does not imply that the exclusive citizenship regime does not affect citizens themselves. While it may be theoretically possible to achieve a more inclusive version of citizenship while maintaining a subservient class of noncitizens, the political strategies deployed by Gulf rulers and state institutions suggest it may be impossible in practice. By cornering many citizens into the public sector, progressively stripping citizens of their economic leverage over capital, and rendering citizens dependent on ruling-class institutions to allocate resources to sustain citizenship privileges, political power and decision-making processes are concentrated at the highest strata of society. In political economy terms, state institutions and the public sector function as mechanisms of surplus distribution for the citizen population. However, rather than being distributed based on a rights-based framework, citizenship privileges in the Gulf are often circumscribed by loyalty and proximity to ruling classes. Once again, the effect of this arrangement is that the structure of citizenship in the Gulf places various groups in structural competition with one another. Far from promoting notions of egalitarianism and equality, this model of citizenship serves to maintain ruling-class power.

Belonging and Exclusion

While citizenship may define who belongs in a certain community and who doesn't, the concept of citizenship also helps us to think through how those who are included relate to those who are excluded. In other words, how does citizenship structure the relationship between citizens and noncitizens? As this report has demonstrated, this relationship is of utmost political importance in the Gulf. The kafala system, which the majority of noncitizens encounter as a result of immigration policy, designates a citizen to govern over their noncitizen employees. A relationship that would usually be confined to noncitizens and the state is now extended and personalized through the citizen population. Citizens become "responsible" for the well-being of their employee, further reinforcing the connection between residency and labor for noncitizens. This deflects responsibility from the state in matters related to immigration and labor. Further, it allows Gulf rulers to produce a form of loyalty by delegating state authority to their citizens. In return, citizens leverage their exclusive citizenship privileges over noncitizens. From visa-trading schemes to shadow partners, noncitizens are reduced to sources of rent. Unsurprisingly, this can lead to forms of racism, alienation, depersonalization, a lack of care for migrant rights, and extra-economic coercion. In a similar fashion to the distribution of oil rents and other surpluses, the distribution of "citizenship rents" is also structured by a citizens' proximity to ruling-class power.

Building a more inclusive vision of citizenship in the Gulf requires a fundamental rethinking of the exclusive citizenship regime, and the establishment of universal social, economic, and political rights that do not discriminate on the basis of citizenship. The efforts of migrant workers to collectively mobilize and the emerging solidarities between citizen and noncitizen workers are important milestones in building more inclusive and democratic societies. They represent alternative visions of citizenship that are not exclusive and dependent on proximity to ruling-class power. However, these efforts are relatively atomized and arise largely from a position of weakness, given the high political costs associated with collective action. As such, highlighting the need for robust universal social, economic, and political

rights regardless of citizenship provides a wider framework for debating inclusion and belonging in the Gulf. Making noncitizens central to this debate not only recognizes that they are key political actors in their own right, it contests both the meaning of citizenship and the preexisting social order in the Gulf.

As this report has demonstrated, the relationship between citizens and noncitizens is not a zero-sum game. If citizens themselves want to challenge the power of ruling monarchies in the Gulf and hierarchical forms of citizenship, it is essential that they fight for extending equal social and political rights to noncitizen workers as well. Doing so lays the basis for new political alliances and forms of organization, disrupts the efforts of ruling classes to stratify the population along citizenship lines, and promotes an inclusive vision of citizenship that is more democratic and egalitarian in spirit.

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Notes

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