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Contradictions of citizenship and environmental politics in the Arabian littoral

Ian R. Simpson

Department of Heritage and Society, Leiden University, Leiden, the Netherlands

ABSTRACT

This article scrutinizes the limitations of environmental citizenship among citizens and non-citizens in the Arab Gulf states, with a focus on the United Arab Emirates (UAE). There are particularly heightened concerns about water scarcity, food security, marine pollution, and dependence on oil and gas industries and how states can address these challenges in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Yet environmental citizenship in the Indian Ocean's Arabian littoral remains poorly understood both in terms of theoretical and grounded questions. This article considers how labor relations and discourses relating to citizenship, environment and sustainability enable or foreclose environmental reform in GCC countries. It shifts the technological and economic focus predominant in literature on sustainability in the GCC to take a more social perspective and examine distinctions between citizens and non-citizens and the depoliticising of environmental claims and national industrial legacies.

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Introduction

This article scrutinizes the limitations of environmental citizenship among citizens and non-citizens in the Arab Gulf states, with a focus on the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE and Oman are currently the only Arab Gulf members of the Indian Ocean Rim Association, but other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, notably Saudi Arabia and Qatar, also have significant transnational ties and increasing investments with countries across the Indian Ocean.

Focusing on transnational migration and labor in the Indian Ocean within a framework of environmental citizenship in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) helps to illuminate ecological and environmental aspects of these economies that are otherwise largely overlooked. Employing a political ecology and critical heritage approach, I consider how labor relations and discourses relating to citizenship, environment and sustainability enable or foreclose energy and environmental reform in the GCC countries, with the aim of providing a conceptual and grounded problematisation of environmental citizenship in this

CONTACT Ian R. Simpson i.r.simpson@arch.leidenuniv.nl Leiden University, Einsteinweg 2, 2333 CC, Leiden, the Netherlands

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regional context. The article questions the ideal notion of environmental citizenship often applied and discusses the challenges to this ideal in a social, political and historical framework — rather than as scientific and technological problems alone — focusing on the significance of migrant communities and transnationalism in GCC countries. Based on this framework, I argue that the distinction and specific relationship between citizens and non-citizens in GCC countries diminishes pressures for environmental reform due to a culture of citizen privilege built on extractivism, the social and political exclusion of the expatriate and migrant majority, and the occluding and depoliticising of environmental claims and hydrocarbon industrial legacies.

In recent decades GCC states and non-state actors have begun implementing policies and efforts aimed at public awareness and action in relation to environmental issues and initiating more open public debate about environmental challenges. However, despite recent efforts to place sustainability in GCC countries in critical perspective (Sillitoe, 2014), there is still relatively little general or contextualized social analysis of conceptions of nature, environment and sustainability in the region. The article therefore attempts to unpack the epistemic and normative dimensions of citizenship and environmental governance in the Arab Gulf, with a focus on the privileges of citizen status, labor relations and constructions of belonging and sustainability in national heritage, with particular attention to contradictions in the relationship between citizens and expatriate or migrant groups in GCC societies.

During the twentieth century, Arab Gulf states relied extensively on immigration and migrant labor to build extractive industrial infrastructures, develop petro-economies, and subsequently to work in education, health, IT, consumer commerce, mass tourism, leisure and other sectors that indirectly resulted. Today, dependence on very large expatriate workforces is deeply embedded, political participation is generally weak, efforts to nationalize the workforce are resisted, and rigid social, political and economic boundaries are often drawn along national lines between communities. The possibility of duties and rights and their social outcomes in GCC countries have to be considered within these unique demographic, social and political realities, and, as I discuss below, environmental citizenship needs to be understood in these contexts not as bounded by the nation state but as global, regional or transnational in relation to belonging, place-making, rights and duties. I show that the complexity of scale involved due to multiple types of migration and transnational relations means that environmental citizenship must be conceived as more spatially distributed and in historical perspective in order to grasp the entangled ecologies and livelihoods that transnationalism and globalized extractivism entail.

The article first discusses the environmental significance of endowed citizens and migrant laborers and then the relation between these two categories, based on which I show how their interrelations work to uphold GCC cultures of consumerism as well as a structure of social-political exclusion. I then turn to discuss environmental discourses in governance and cultural constructions of belonging and sustainability, showing how these are also related to the distinction between the citizen-foreigner relationship in the GCC region and how they preclude environmental citizenship in terms of questioning existing human-environment relations embedded in industrial extractivism and in terms of debating the rights of migrant communities, despite the GCC simultaneously depending on this majority as the labor force that has designed, built and serviced urban projects, industrial infrastructures and tourism in the region, which in turn

enable consumption. The article can therefore be read as a problematisation and a grounded argument about national and transnational belonging, migrant labor and environmental citizenship in a specific setting that has arisen from extractivism, transnationalism and globalization.

Endowing citizens, limiting duties

The question of environmental duties and rights in the Arabian Peninsula can be approached by addressing how it applies differently to each of the two main structural groups, national citizens and expatriates or migrants, and their contrasting social contracts with the rulers and governments of GCC countries, although the duties and rights of these two groups are interrelated in the sense that each group's economic and social status leads to the concerns and limitations attached to each other's duties and rights. I will address national citizens first, arguing that state initiatives aim to persuade citizens to pay for environmentalism based on an assumption of individual duty that is in conflict with privileges characteristic of GCC citizenship.

In the Arab Gulf states, the distribution of capital derived from fossil-fuel extraction is central to the differences created between tribal, elite and other citizen families on the one hand and non-citizen social groups on the other (Gardner, 2010; Kapiszewski, 2001). National citizens are endowed through state welfare spending, benefits and public sector salaries by a ruling monarchy that redistributes government revenues (corporate tax revenues on oil and gas) from the surplus economy, while other (non-citizen) groups acquire capital predominantly through the means of labor. In general there are no taxes on wage income for national citizens or for non-citizens. Citizens of GCC countries have been afforded direct handouts or subsidies and given the status of landholders with the authority to employ people, upon which the system of migrant labor hinges. It is significant that national citizens are the only people with the official authority to sponsor and employ guest workers. Paul Dresch (2005; 2006, pp. 203–204) has discussed concerns about guarding citizenship and its privileges in the face of very high proportions of foreign residents in Arab Gulf states, reflected by restrictions on marrying foreigners and descent defined within rigid boundaries. The elite groups' association with state government and their kin relations are also maintained through a specific way of controlling capital and labor, namely by relying on a political economy and decidedly liberal organization of labor that excludes the majority from most of the state's provisions. Citizens are also privileged by access to the vast majority of employment in the state public sector, although these jobs are distributed unevenly along family, sectarian and tribal lines (Gardner, 2010, pp. 144–146), while non-nationals nearly all work in private sectors. Another aspect of the relationship to the state that should be emphasised is that political representation and participation is generally weak.

The above dynamic and its specific possibilities and limitations that influence environmental ethics, policy and action in the Arab Gulf states will be explored in more detail, such as the effect of endowed citizens on their perception of environmental duties, and the relationship between political participation and social outcomes concerning environmental issues. In most Arab Gulf states where national citizens make up only a minority among a majority of diverse expatriate groups, it is worth contemplating to what extent national citizens form a body politic or socially coherent community and whether this is

a factor in the ability to debate, cultivate and organize around a new set of environmental ethics within the privileges of national citizenship.

The political economy of GCC countries raises issues about the effectiveness of both citizens' requests for government policy and action regarding issues such as pollution and global warming, and the government's ability to implement change requiring private individuals to act. For example, when it comes to large-scale energy transition and installing solar power at the individual household level, Luciani (2014, p. 21) notes that

> encouraging small investors such as families or commercial enterprises to exploit their roof space or cover their parking lots with PV panels requires a more complex and difficult relationship between the single buyer and a very large number of potential providers; this kind of relationship is unusual in the region, where individual citizens and families have only sporadic direct contact with government authorities and the administrative capacity of the state to penetrate society is limited.

In addition, the provision of highly subsidized fuel, electricity and water for homes and personal cars makes it especially difficult to incentivise or change 'consumer decisions and behaviours towards less wasteful use of resources', making large, fuel-inefficient vehicles 'a desirable and economically viable alternative' for instance (EWS-WWF, 2015, p. 69).

Thus endowed or privileged citizens and a lack of political participation (notwithstanding other, local cultural forms of participation) limits rights and obligations of citizens with respect to environmental issues. Citizens are treated primarily as consumers of environmental goods and services, yet citizens enjoy subsidies leaving little incentive to change consumption or to debate existing and alternative environmental ethics. The green economy, sustainability and energy transition in the Gulf is mainly approached through a contractual view of environmental responsibility in which the government and citizens are the focus, and the challenge of greener economies and greener living is addressed as a problem of technology and the skilled labor this requires. This notion of local, contractual environmental responsibility is deployed despite the relationship between the citizen and the 'state', or ruling family governments, in GCC countries where citizens have not paid the taxes normally thought to impose obligations on the state towards them (although recently governments have attempted to introduce Value Added Tax and other taxes). In light of this particular social contract in GCC states, what is the potential of the relationships between governmental authorities and social groups in engendering debate, action and reform on issues related to energy, environment and nature?

There is a growing number of empirical studies in Arab Gulf contexts on evidence for 'environmental citizenship', even if they do not employ this term explicitly. The studies aim to establish what citizens value, their attitudes and so on, with the aim of understanding how policy and efforts to instill environmental responsibility among citizens can be best formulated. For example, a Willingness to Pay study in the UAE conducted in 2014–15 uses survey data from a sample consisting of 1,282 citizens and indicates that respondents perceived environmental problems not as individual but as a government social responsibility (Yaghi & Alibeli, 2017). The authors argue that citizens are overly dependent on government for environmental protection. While the Willingness to Pay methodology is used to explore how people perceive environmental problems, it presupposes

environmental citizenship in terms of ideal state and non-state actors. The authors contend that citizens in the UAE need to be made more aware that they have a major role to play as engaged and responsible citizens, that such realization will lead to a willingness to pay to protect the environment, and ought to shoulder this burden by paying environmental taxes. As Bell (2014, p. 357) asserts, this is environmental citizenship made 'complicit in the neoliberal agenda of privatizing and individualizing responsibility for environmental problems that can only be solved by collective political, and ultimately state, action'.

This thinking is in line with the UAE government's New Public Management approach which 'targets people's policy engagement by emphasizing their moral obligation to act upon those environmental values in which they believe', and assumes that such change equates to values of equality and fairness in society (Yaghi & Alibeli, 2017, p. 53). Here we see an assumption of duty of the individual, which, despite claims that government and citizens be involved in open dialogue, presupposes the citizen is a normative actor that has environmental responsibilities, rather than problematizing the situation by starting from the contradictions or paradox of the current composite of a political economy of rapid growth, extensive transnational workforces, consumption, GHG emissions and so on. It is clear these studies and the state discourse they engage with reflect a tendency to instrumentalise citizenship in order to foster greener behavior and sustainable development, in which an instrumental sensibility 'takes the focus off citizenship as an actively (and not merely theoretically) contested concept/status/practice' (Latta, 2007, p. 385).

An interesting aspect of Arab Gulf states promoting environmental responsibility among citizens is the assumed link this approach has with efforts to move away from extensive welfare and subsidies for citizens, introduce taxes and diversify GCC economies. Again, rather than considering less consumption and less growth as a starting point to reduce and mitigate environmental problems, the idea is to create citizens that pay for being pro-environmental. Others criticise such demands as too narrow and unlikely to result in greener behavior without 'broadening environmental citizenship' by fostering an overall architecture or culture of greener, environmental thinking and acting (Horton, 2006). While painting a broad picture as I have here can eclipse variation and different approaches, the GCC is generally a social and political landscape where citizenship, with its privileges of state handouts and zero taxes, has been built on revenues made from unmatched fossil-fuel sources and where environmental citizenship is not seen as an opportunity for nationals to question and rethink the nexus of extractivism, petro-economies and environmental crises in which they live but to reframe subsidies for citizens as services that they should feel obligated to contribute to financing, including environmental regulations and protection.

Migrants, rights and embodied materialities

Turning to expatriates and migrants, the other main structural group, this section shows how the possibilities of environmental movements are also limited by the social and political exclusion of expatriates and migrants. It is remarkable that although most GCC countries have comparatively small populations — for example 9.63 million in the UAE, 4.83 million in Oman, but larger in Saudi Arabia with 33.70 million (numbers in 2018 World Bank, 2019, June 29) — they are host to high numbers of non-nationals who

disproportionately comprise the total labor force, mainly in construction and domestic work but increasingly in other sectors and at all 'skill levels', and non-nationals make up the majority of the population in most Gulf countries. For instance, in 2017 expatriates comprised 45% of the population in Oman and 75% of the population in Bawshar province where the capital Muscat is located (National Center for Statistics and Information, 2018; 2019, June 29). Expatriates comprised 88.5% of the population in the UAE in 2010 (UAE Government, 2019, June 29), and 92% of the Emirate of Dubai in 2018 (Dubai Statistics Center, 2018). Moreover, migrant workers constitute even greater proportions of actual labor forces in GCC nations (Al-Ubaydli, 2015), and figures for some districts are likely to be underestimates due to undocumented, unofficial and forced-labour migrants and refugees. Saudi Arabia and the UAE are, respectively, the fourth and fifth largest migrant countries globally and the GCC nations together host more than 10% of all migrants worldwide (ILO, 2019a, June 29; 2019b, June 29).

Overall migrant figures alone say nothing of the precarious nature of much migrant labor, the wide diversity of communities, transnational connections, and hierarchies within them, or changing trends in migration and mobility. For instance, in the 1990s, the largest migration to the Arab Gulf ensued from India, and especially from the state of Kerala and from certain districts within Kerala (Willoughby 2006). Out-migration from India still predominates but recently the number of migrants from wealthier states like Kerala has declined and migration from states in northern India is growing (Chanda & Gupta, 2018). Another trend has been a shift from only a small proportion of female migrants in the 1990s to double the number by 2013 (Chanda & Gupta, 2018).

These hugely-significant expatriate labor forces have been encouraged through open entrance requirements and private employment enabled through the infamous *kafala* system of sponsorship, in which a national citizen, or organization, has the right to employ people and is also meant to be liable for their conduct and safety (duty of care). Kafala governs the legal entry and status of expatriates and migrants and allows employees to work only for their sponsor. Scholars have argued that kafala, originally a work-permit system in the rentier-state paradigm, has evolved into a foundational, controlling platform of exclusion in society that is a consequence of state-citizens endowed with privileges and authority over patronage of the majority of people in the GCC region, their access to labor, and so on (Dito, 2015; Longva, 1997). Since the 1960s, migrants became separated from the resident population

> not only by the national and ethnic re-composition and diversification of the residential and working population, but also through the introduction of more developed forms of geographical, workplace and legal segregation and rotation designed to minimize the possibility of political, economic, cultural or social links being forged between migrants and the indigenous population. (Chalcraft, 2010, p. 22)

Crucially, maintaining state capital only among patrons serves as an impulse to preserve kafala because it provides the labor mechanism that partly enables production, the revenues derived therefrom and Gulf cultures of consumption.

The kafala system can be very restrictive for expatriates' rights, labor contracts and freedom of movement, as the International Labor Organization sums up: 'While in some cases, employers may welcome the responsibilities of the kafala system and treat the worker well, the inherent imbalance in the rights and responsibilities of each party can

create a situation which is exploitative of the worker' (ILO, 2019b, June 29). If the tendency for abuse and exploitation of migrants in the GCC is widely attributed to the system of sponsorship on which migrant labor operates (Fargues & Shah, 2018), the possibility of attuning and attending to its associated ecological and environmental challenges initially seems meagre when this system is widespread and underpins the majority of the Gulf's workforce. The kafeel status of citizens is a double-edged privilege, both obligating responsibilities to guests and favoring their exploitation. Kafala shifts environmental duties from the state to the citizen and thereby responsibility can tend to be diffused. Political exclusion due to lack of civic and political participation of non-nationals in the Gulf (or their place of origin) does not allow representation of environmental matters among the GCC majority populous (expatriates), yet if environmental concerns like exposure to harmful conditions are to be addressed, let alone other changes, then recognizing environmental costs, political participation and efforts to nationalize workforces will be needed.

So far I have touched on citizens and the non-citizen majority separately, but this distinction is important in many walks of life in the Gulf not only as a distinction but, I argue here, as a dialectal relationship both in principle and in grounded ways: in the structure of GCC societies, nationals and expatriates/migrants enable each other's relative position, status and environmental burdens in a fundamental way. Dresch (2006, pp. 200–201) has argued for conceiving the structure of these societies as specialized polities in which the distinction between national or citizen and foreigner (expatriate or migrant) is integral and the non-citizen is conceived not as an issue of controlling migration and borders, but as constitutive of society in a way that is particular to GCC states. Extending this idea, the subjects created by GCC nations (whether citizens, camel races, tall buildings or shopping malls) are only enabled by foreign, non-nationals living in the region, and yet it is national subjects that have often drawn the attention and predominate in studies of culture and nationalism in GCC countries because they appear as iconic of national efforts alone. I will return to the citizen and the foreigner (the expatriate or migrant) and argue that rather than being a dichotomy, they are part and parcel of environmental citizenship and its constraints in the deterritorialised, transnational spaces of the Arab Gulf.

I have discussed citizenship and the limited rights and participation of migrant communities in GCC states in order to sketch out how these relations might be important for situating any notion of environmental citizenship. Due to the above social stratification and divisions, conditions and challenges are experienced differently by different groups in the context of the harsh and sensitive ecological environments of the Gulf. For instance, the embodiment of coping in the region's arid to very arid climate, extensive sun exposure and very high seasonal temperatures and humidity levels can vary strikingly between citizens and migrant communities, and needs to be given attention. Mean air temperatures in Abu Dhabi for the period 2003–2018, on aggregate, ranged from 20.1°C in January to 35.5°C in August, reaching a mean maximum of 40.2°C and an absolute maximum of 48°C (National Centre of Meteorology, 2019). In Muscat the minimum/maximum temperature in January was 16.7/25.1°C, climbing to 30.3/40°C in June, based on mean values observed over a 30-year period (World Meteorological Organisation, 2019, June 29). Notably in 2018, Oman recorded its highest ever *minimum* temperature (42.6°C) to date, in Quriyat (NOAA National Centers for Environmental Information, 2018). On land, evaporation is high, annual rainfall typically of less than 100 millimeters and vegetation cover sparse (Cadène & Dumortier, 2013). Prevailing winds (the *Shamal*) on the south coast of the

Gulf increase humidity levels as they bring moisture ashore. It is the combination of very humid and hot air—best indicated by *wet bulb* temperatures—that places human and non-human bodies at their physiological limits, and migrants working in construction, domestic jobs, factories and other sectors may find themselves in these conditions. Many live and work without air-conditioning, while in contrast citizens are mainly afforded the comfort of artificially-cooled office workplaces, homes and vehicles. In some versions, environmental citizenship is conceived as extending rights to future generations of human and non-humans, ensuring them healthy ecosystems and limited climate change. This conception helps to reveal the additional aspects of expatriate experiences, who toil in industries that require exposure to extreme environmental conditions, and to draw attention to those who are politically and structurally excluded and isolated.

Does economic growth need to be so rapid that people in construction work shifts in extreme conditions, rather than regulating the sector so that they do not endure extreme humid-heat conditions during the long summer? It is obviously a duty within the labor contract to ensure people are not exposed to extreme, toxic or unsafe conditions, yet this is neglected precisely because the environmental body politic remains nascent in the GCC. I argue that it is only through accounts of migrants' experiences, such as ethnographic descriptions and stories, that the controlled and surveilled body politic can be glimpsed through a different lens that reveals experience and vulnerability as the body endures in some parts of the CGG migrant labor system. For instance, in the case of the Malayalam novel Goat Days, Benyāmin (2016) vividly portrays the daily sweating and stench that the character Najeeb, a migrant from Kerala, is forced to experience while indentured in farm labor in Saudi Arabia. Mahdavi (2012) retells narratives of domestic migrant workers in Dubai who moved from the formal to the informal economy and the potential abuse this can lead to such as forced labor and trafficking. Bristol-Rhys (2012) describes how migrants experience social boundaries in Abu Dhabi, where laborers live in camps isolated from the city and are ferried between work sites in special buses, while city workers live in rundown parts of the city, often sharing crowded apartments and in some cases taking turns to sleep due to space limitation. Laborers, migrant workers, expats, and Emiratis are also separated by the way other urban spaces in Abu Dhabi are designated or understood as social spaces specific to family, the wealthy or otherwise off-limits for some due to entrance or transport requirements, and migrants are assuredly policed along these social boundaries.

Any account of migrant communities does not simply define them by reference to their subordination but can be read to illuminate their lived experience of the conditions they are put under and to attend to greater possibilities that can emerge from this toward environmental reform. Revealing the political ecologies and hidden environmental issues of large or majority populations of migrants in this way is a necessary step not only toward adopting ethics and regulations that would prevent labor in extreme, toxic or unsafe conditions but also toward a fuller, *inclusive* accounting and knowledge of the overall ecological and health impacts of GCC petro-economies.

Foreclosing rights and duties

I discuss further here the interrelationship between nationals and non-nationals in the GCC to consider the utility of environmental citizenship in its liberal form by exploring labor

relations more in depth. Dresch (2006, pp. 214–215) provides an example of these relations which involves fishermen in the northern UAE and how its particular social structure leads to duties and also objections to migrants and concerns about environmental problems that can be contradictory:

> Some years ago now, having absorbed the language of ecology and conservation, owners of the grounds were in danger of being fished out. The damage was attributed to "Asian fishermen." It is only going through old newspaper files that one realizes, first, how long this has been going on and how often a law has been passed that has then not been applied, and second that the "Asian fishermen" in question are actually the employees of citizens. It could not be otherwise. They are not sailing over from the Malabar Coast or the Comoros Islands but are resident on the Gulf coast and therefore have local *kufalā'* or "sponsors." Finally a law was passed (Federal Law No. 23 of 1999) insisting that local owners be present on these boats at sea to supervise what was done; the owners, having denounced the generalized Asian presence at length, then protested volubly that they had other things to do and could not spare time to bob around on the ocean supervising individual crews.

This localized example is symptomatic of a broader contradiction integral to developing a contextualized practical understanding of environmental citizenship in the UAE and other GCC countries: considering how the duties of national citizens, due to the sponsorship system, extend to a responsibility for the activities and actions of people employed under their privilege as citizens. Since GCC citizens carry the state-like authority to grant entry and employment to potential employees, the kafala system raises the question of whether it therefore also imposes on *kafeel*-citizens responsibilities concerning the environmental and ecological aspects of labor in these countries.

Assuming economic, civil and political rights include environmental rights, this labor relationship with non-citizens in GCC countries can thus serve as an indicator of whether the environmental experience and rights of expatriates are addressed. For instance, Pandya and Sparding (2016) have recently discussed labor issues in the context of the 'green economy' in the GCC, including how the requirements of a green economy shape labor migration and vice versa, especially from the perspective of institutions, employers and the International Labor Organization. While the authors focus on the skilled labor force needed and obstacles to creating it, the obstacles they identify are relevant to imagining any practical application of environmental citizenship in its liberal version. Pandya and Sparding (2016, pp. 197–198) argue that

> whereas social inclusion has now become a standard feature of the international discourse on environmental protection, green economy and green growth, the specifically labour dimensions of social inclusion will face significant obstacles in many of the GCC countries. Trade unions and other workers' organisations are weak or non-existent in Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, beleaguered even in Bahrain where they previously enjoyed some influence with policymakers, and nascent in Oman. In the absence of strong labour voices, the capacity and willingness of policymakers to attend to workforce considerations from the perspective of workers' interests will thus be slight.

In other words, the labor system leads to the relative social exclusion of migrant workers in GCC nations and also forms the obstacle to recognizing workers' environmental rights generally, not only those of migrant workers, thus having an impact more broadly. In a system that exploits transnational inequalities in labor for the needs of production, it is difficult but necessary to reveal and act on the hidden environmental costs that are

avoided by politically excluding and structurally isolating large numbers of migrant workers. For instance, how can we apprehend the ecologically unjust differences between citizens and migrant workers living without decent conditions? I propose that it is by unpacking the structure of the political and labor relations enabled through transnationalism in the GCC economies that we can grasp how this creates the space for citizens and governments to feel they are making a real shift to more sustainable behavior (citizens doing their bit to consume more sustainably, and governments making services more environmentally efficient and lower-carbon), but to still rely on a politically underrepresented or unrepresented workforce to supply those changes. It is through the lens of labor that we can see this discordance, at least in the affairs of GCC nations, where in practice environmental citizenship appears structurally limited when presented with questions such as whether national citizens would feel responsible for creating a green economy, or green jobs, when these countries rely principally on a permanent flow of temporary migrants to meet workforce demands.

The material and spatial dimension of the citizen-foreigner distinction enabled through GCC-configured labor and transnationalism can also be examined to reflect critically on environmental citizenship. The materiality and spatiality of different social groups — such as the large villas owned by national citizens and staffed by foreigners, houses rented by Europeans and other migrants, and labor camps predominantly for Asian migrants in Dubai — need to be accounted for in studies of urban environmental relations and the possibilities and limitations of environmental citizenship. For example, Dresch (2006, p. 210) reported that for Emiratis in Abu Dhabi it is considered respectable to live in a private villa with an outer enclosure, which is associated with security and independence, and deviation from this can be seen as weakening cultural and social ties to other nationals. Keeping in mind the close guarding and rigidity of GCC citizenship, if the walled villa form is partly constitutive of being a citizen, it means taking seriously the political ecology of home that has emerged in the citizen-foreigner distinction as part of the structural possibilities and limitations of environmental belonging or citizenship. It becomes important to reveal how the water needed for villa gardens and the numerous foreign domestic staff needed to tend them are part of and integral to the ecological aspects of citizenship in the UAE, if not the other Arab Gulf states as well. The Emirati villas contrast with the mass camps for migrant laborers, which by comparison represent a low environmental burden in consumption terms but a high health risk with their overcrowding and poor conditions, and yet migrants intentionally hide these conditions from their home family and instead attempt to stage a consumerist lifestyle (Gardner, 2012). The villa gardens in some way parallel an official, national strategy of greening the UAE (Ouis, 2002), and when it comes to tourism this greening and the meanings of beauty, vitality and modern progress that greening aims to symbolize awkwardly conceals the ecological context of aridity, water scarcity and impacts of tourism development, especially when combined with the unfettered rights to consumption given to tourists (Stephenson & Vyas, 2017). Such questions about disjunctures between environmental attitudes and realities (Robbins & Sharp, 2003), which start with understanding patterns of migration, ethnicity, labor relations and social and economic status, are as crucial in Indian Ocean settings as they in any context.

Another strand of the environmental dimension of transnational labor in the GCC is in the role of remittances, which can be significant in environmental protection in places of

origin. Campbell (2014, p. 213) points out that sources of labor for Nepalese migrant workers in Qatar generate remittances that support distant conservation initiatives and protection of biodiversity in other places, such as in Nepal, and with good reason highlights the need to study connections between sustainable biodiversity conservation and migrant labor. Similarly, we can ask more generally how the globalizing forces that have expanded transnational mobility and migrant labor have varying, indirect ecological effects in distant places.

The globalizing dimension of migration is clearly in additional tension with liberal versions of environmental citizenship in GCC countries not only because of the practical difficulty of citizens acknowledging a duty to distant strangers in other territories that have caused far smaller ecological impacts (Dobson, 2003), but also acknowledging a duty to their expatriate populations within Arab Gulf countries. This aligns with and extends Hailwood's (2005) point about needing to account for the stranger in environmental citizenship, including transnational migrant workers and their distant locales of return. It seems increasingly important theoretically and practically as migration, displacement and mobility are driven, in part, by the effects of global warming and environmental problems. The citizen and the stranger, rather than a dichotomy, are part and parcel of the difficulties in discerning the duties and rights of environmental citizenship at multiple scales within Arab Gulf states.

Environmental discourses and initiatives

The ecological and environmental relationships entrenched in GCC oil and gas societies have received comparatively little attention in social science and political science studies. In contrast, this section takes a broad look at policy and discourse of environmental authorities and private industry to reflect on how GCC governments and non-state actors have more recently begun formulating and implementing policies and efforts aimed at raising awareness and taking action on issues in the context of energy transition, issues of food and water security, and governments in the Gulf engaging more openly in public debate about environmental concerns.

Cities in the GCC face potentially high degrees of social vulnerability and impact due to climate change, pollution and related shortages of energy, food and water. There are particularly heightened concerns about sustainability due to high consumption levels, dependence on imports and arid environmental settings in GCC countries. Water scarcity is already a pressing issue (Ward & Ruckstuhl, 2017), exacerbated by rising demand as agriculture and urban populations expand. Industry, urbanization, tourism development and coastal reclamation have adversely affected the marine environs, for instance by affecting fauna such as mangrove plants that support sea animals. Further problems are industrial pollution (oiling of wildlife, insufficiently treated wastes, discharges from desalination plants, and pollution from shipping such as oil spillage and dumping of ballast) causing indirect impact on ecosystems and shallow-water marine species vulnerable to temperature variation due to anthropogenic global warming (Abuzinada, Barth, Krupp, Böer, & Abdessalaam, 2008; Khan, Munawar, & Price, 2002; Krupp & Abuzinada, 2008; Sheppard et al., 2010; Shriadah, 1999; Stephenson & Vyas, 2017).

While the GCC has primarily been a major oil and gas exporting region, its demographic and industrial growth that has indirectly resulted has also driven up energy consumption

in Arab Gulf countries to among the highest per capita worldwide. This development has in turn created increasing reliance on petroleum and natural gas in order to produce energy for water desalination and air-conditioning, among other uses. The rapid and continuing expansion of industry, population and urban areas, mass tourism and rising consumption levels form part of a wider set of external and domestic factors to which Arab Gulf states are responding (Fox, Mourtada-Sabbah, & al-Mutawa, 2006). If the petro-monarchies of the Arab Gulf are emblematic of a globalized ideology of extractivism and growth, is it also those governing elites that should lead the way in cultivating new values and implementing fundamentally different ideals under an energy transition, and to what extent are they playing this role?

Although GCC countries rely deeply on oil and gas extraction and are among the highest per-capita energy consumers globally, all six GCC countries have ratified the Paris Agreement, Oman most recently in 2019, and are making efforts to introduce policies and action in line with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). Taking the UAE as a notable example, in recent years it has perhaps been the most prominent in taking steps to put in place authorities and policies concerned with energy transition, climate change, and sustainability. In 2015, it launched the UAE Green Agenda 2015–2030, and in 2016, established a Ministry of Climate Change and Environment and the UAE Council on Climate Change and Environment. In 2017, the UAE formulated its Energy Strategy 2050, which aims to increase clean energy sources to 50% and reduce the carbon footprint of energy production by 70% by 2050, and drew up the National Climate Change Plan for 2017–2050, which aims to manage greenhouse gas emissions, increase climate resilience and promote economic diversification, all while sustaining growth (Ministry of Climate Change and Environment, 2017). Well known among the numerous organizations that have partnered with the UAE government on environmental and sustainability challenges are The Sustainable City in Dubai (https://www.thesustainablecity.ae/), Masdar City (Günel, 2019) and the related Masdar Institute (https://www.ku.ac.ae/institute/masdar-institute/), which is now part of Khalifa University, and Emirates Wildlife Society in association with World Wildlife Fund (EWS-WWF, 2018). These government-related organizations and the government itself are endorsed by an absolute monarchy and its contemporary tribal leadership. The International Renewable Energy Agency is also currently headquartered in the country, and the UAE has altogether positioned itself as a regional leader in efforts to innovate sustainability and decarbonization of its cities and energy generation.

The Masdar City initiative is a good example of the extensive yet concealed or overlooked reliance on migrant labor in developing a sustainable eco-city that would shift dependence from petroleum revenues in the UAE and 'liberate humanity from its guilt-ridden consciousness of the twentieth century' (Günel, 2019, p. 63). Günel argues that inserting existing divisions of labor and social space into Masdar City and relying on temporary migrants to construct and maintain the site have mattered less than valuing and developing a vision for a future of sustainable living and renewable energy.

These developments are paralleled by studies, working papers and grey literature that typify an empirical assumption that organizations and states in the Arab Gulf do indeed function as ideal environmental actors. For instance, Alam and Luomi (2018) suggest that GCC governments would best facilitate non-state and subnational actors on climate action through means of state consultation, considering the otherwise limited

political participation and avenues to exercise political action. They advocate for governments raising awareness about 'the benefits of measuring and managing GHG emissions, and of energy efficiency and renewable energy as cost-effective mitigation measures' (Alam & Luomi, 2018, p. 34), with the aim of encouraging non-state actors to join transnational climate governance initiatives (initiatives that are governmental efforts to address climate change through transnational means involving at least one non-nation-state actor by explicitly seeking to govern (steer or conduct) a constituency towards specific public ends, as defined in Bulkeley et al. (2014, p. 18)).

There is a strong focus on sustainability in a range of issues, but in most cases this is a normative, ideal notion of sustainability. The environmental duties and rights framework of citizenship is used to promote a discourse of 'technological' sustainability but not to scrutinize the extractivism basis of GCC petro-cultures. Also lacking is a critical view of sustainability that addresses issues of justice and equity in relation to citizens, non-citizens and transnational connections, for instance, of the social and economic inequities encouraged by the differential environmental conditions experienced and the structure of migrant labor relations in the GCC. In this sense the discourse on sustainability and environment in the GCC often lacks a realistic inner landscape of society in these countries. The discussions of sustainability, greening, energy transition and other environmental challenges in the GCC (Abdel-Raouf & Luomi, 2016; Abdelraouf & Azar, 2017; Akhonbay, 2018; Bryde, Mouzughi, & Al Rasheed, 2015; Luciani & Ferroukhi, 2014; Luomi, 2015; Sillitoe, 2014) in the main lack consideration of the political dimension these issues, particularly an articulation with social inequities in the Gulf such as the politically marginalized majority population and social and economic hierarchies within the labor force. Crucially, GCC regimes of governmentality preclude environmental citizenship in terms of rights for the large migrant populations, despite at the same time depending on this majority to enable production and consumption. The following section draws a link between this area of governance and national constructions of belonging and sustainability.

Promoting sustainability

Cultural heritage is a field of construction that often shapes national identity and can be used by social and political actors to foster environmental responsibility among organizations and the public. This might be to cultivate alternative approaches and perspectives to consumption, energy and sustainability, but heritage can also be used to legitimate and uphold dominant or normative views of human-environment relations. Here I consider whether heritage practices address the ethos of growth and consumption, or exploit and (re)shape the past and history in the present in attempts to inform sustainability initiatives in productive or romanticizing ways. I also want to show how these efforts connect with, or marginalize, significant numbers of people when they are constrained by the homogenizing tendency of national heritage.

Knowing that nationalism is engineered partly through cultural practices, it would seem reasonable to suggest that just as states have invented traditions, constructed heritage, and fashioned cultural forms in order to define national identity, they can, in principle, also exploit these same tools to forge a more environmentally and ecologically slanted discourse about the nation, citizenship and belonging. Looking at ways organizations mobilize and deploy tradition in their attempts to foster and shape environmental

citizenship, the example here regards construction and promotion of the former pearling industry in the Arab Gulf and awareness campaigns and community programs relating to food and resources in the context of present concerns about sustainability. It also concerns who these practices are for, the exclusion of historic and contemporary migrant communities, and the question of political participation.

Environmental organizations in the GCC are involved in efforts to influence consumer choice by issuing consumer guides about sustainable species, some of which recall former human-environment relationships in pearling and other livelihoods. For example, Emirates Wildlife Society works extensively at raising awareness and promoting sustainable lifestyles through direct public campaigns like the Choose Wisely Campaign concerning fish stocks and sustainable fisheries, the Heroes of the UAE program to save energy and water in the home and workplace, and other programs and guidance to inform consumers about energy-efficient and water-efficient products and greener food choices (see EWS-WWF, 2015). These efforts come in the context of degradation or loss of habitats along the coastline of the Gulf from Kuwait to Oman threatening marine species due to the human-environment relations of fossil-fuel extraction, commercial fishing and unintentional catch, urbanization and mass tourism.

Direct outreach to the public as a consumer body attempts to produce types of responsibility among consumers, and this work takes place within a wider set of environmental efforts, such as the Environment Agency Abu Dhabi's monitoring of the fishing industry and raising the awareness needed for conservation of marine species. The EWS-WWF Choose Wisely Campaign harbors a notion of valued 'natural' habitats and ecological knowledge that are seen as embedded in the heritage of fishing and pearling. Consumers are informed about endangered species of fish in the Gulf and responsible buying choices. EWS-WWF has drawn on the UAE's connection to the sea through reference to its traditional pearling and fishing industries and professes that Emiratis are entrusted with this 'heritage'. Pearling and marine heritage are leveraged to draw attention to environmental concerns, to shape an understanding of human effects on marine habitats, and to engender sustainability in consumer culture (Simpson, 2014). This dimension of conservation and cultural heritage relates to current conversations between anthropology, cultural geography and environmental sciences concerned with grasping the nature of post-industrial ecological change (DeSilvey, 2017; Harrison, 2015; Harvey & Perry, 2015; Tsing, 2015).

Despite organizations actively targeting consumers as ideal citizens, it should be noted that the ecological and environmental setting in the GCC means there is litte option for citizens to reconnect with local food producers or avoid global supply chains, long-distance transportation or continuing to import nearly all food. Former agricultural practices consisted of a combination of pastoral nomadism and irrigated cultivation, while fishing provided fresh fish on the coast and dried fish for exchange. As groups shifted to more sedentary modes of livelihood, GCC states today have implemented industrial farming and invested in overseas agricultural land. The conception of green consumer, whether one that consumes less overall or exercises greener consumer choices (Seyfang, 2005), also comes up against rapid rates of economic growth in the GCC, including ongoing development of infrastructure to meet the demand, or vision, of expanded consumption.

The former pearling industry is indeed mobilized as heritage for broader purposes throughout the Arabian littoral, not only in consumer campaigns, and is certainly one of

the most conspicuous aspects of the past that has been selected and promoted to fashion heritage in the present. Pearling is framed in the present as foundational to the economic basis of these coastal societies and it is interesting to consider what effect this heritage work is meant to have in terms of environmental consciousness, what view of nature and society it intends to convey within the context of environmental challenges and problems in the present. The human–environment interactions implied in pearling and seafaring heritage practices conjure an intimate encounter between humans and the environs in the Gulf and a specific cultural, ecological adaptation. Considering this heritage work in the context of environmental concerns described earlier, it would appear to underline the differences between former livelihoods involving close interaction with sensitive ecosystems — even if viewed romantically — and today's rapidly expanding urban centers and industrial areas, overconsumption and high-carbon energy generation, without however aspiring to address directly or fundamentally the ethos of growth and consumption. The differential leveraging of pearling as the iconic national heritage in contrast to petroleum relates respectively to green discourses and environmentalism on the one hand and toxicity, depletion and global warming on the other. One interpretation of this heritage work is that it encourages people to question terms such as natural 'reserves' and natural 'resources', and to debate what their relationship is with nature in the Gulf today (Simpson, 2014). At the same time, as a dominant heritage discourse and practice, its excluding effect is to banish the materiality of twentieth-century development, such as pollution and toxicity, from what is officially considered as heritage.

So various actors mobilize pearling heritage to engender emergent cultural and social imperatives about the environment in the Gulf. Although it is not the case that environmental policy directly drives and shapes these constructions of cultural heritage, there is scope to do so in ways that could contribute to engendering an ethics of care and critically questioning human-environment relations in the Gulf and environmental responsibility, but it will be limited in who this is for because current heritage practices tend to speak only to national citizens, who are a minority in most of the GCC. Besides its distinctive ecological dimension, this is the other aspect of cultural heritage in the Arab Gulf littoral that I wish to scrutinize. When national heritage is constructed, who does it naturalize as national and as having environmental belonging, and into what place does it cast others, such as the Indian Ocean majority in the GCC?

When it comes to the Arab Gulf's Indian Ocean connections, there is a discourse of modernization (see for instance Fox et al., 2006) in which the emergence of transnationalism in the Arabian Peninsula is marked by oil exploitation and globalization in the second half of the twentieth century, before which the Arab-Persian Gulf is framed as a formerly unchanging, traditional society. Yet for centuries prior to this, urban free-ports on the Arabian coast had traded agricultural goods and livestock to India and attracted people from South Asia and East Africa. There is a history of intermingling in the Gulf's outward facing communities (Al-Rasheed, 2005), which formed in a wider inter-Asian context through historic connections such as between port towns in the Arab Gulf and the Indian Ocean. This resulted in the formation of significant social groups, such as Jews (Poirine, 2003) and Africans indentured as pearl divers in Qatar (Hopper, 2015) in Arabian port towns living alongside merchant entrepreneurs and Arab tribal capitalists who established and operated free-ports in the Arab-Persian Gulf (Fattah, 1997). Personal accounts of migration and patronage, which are still handed down from one generation to

the other in the Arab Gulf, reflect the process by which these groups and individuals carved out social spaces. In addition, a strong scholarly focus on the impact of the West, especially British control of the Arab Gulf, has overshadowed these historical transnational connections.

Tracing the contours of this historical and contemporary context of Arabian Gulf communities helps in building the necessary framework to provide a more critical perspective of citizenship in a broader sense in Arab Gulf states and the varying rights and duties regarding the environment in the Indian Ocean today. A problematisation of the social significance of environmental challenges or environmental citizenship in the United Arab Emirates, which does not embrace the historical formation of communities through their Persian, Indian, Jewish or African connections cannot fully explain the limitations of any ideal notions of environmental citizenship in the present.

In the field of cultural heritage in the GCC, there is generally little portrayal of how the above regional and long distance mobility and trade played a role in the social mixing and formation of pre-modern Gulf communities. For instance, notable for their absence are stories of how merchants from Iran and India and laborers from East Africa came to live permanently in the Arabian Peninsula and form part of the social and ethnic inheritance among national citizenry in Arab Gulf states today (Simpson, 2014, p. 40). While there are exceptions, such as an historical account of Indian merchants in the business class in Dubai (Vivekanand, 2008), in general heritage practices marginalize the trans–regional social intermingling in the Gulf, possibly because of concerns, as Dresch (2006) has discussed, about guarding citizenship and its privileges in the face of innumerable foreign residents in Arab Gulf nations. Khalaf (2000, p. 244) argues that inventing traditions such as camel racing also serve to safeguard 'cultural heritage and national identity, as well as the traditional dynastic political structure of the UAE as a modernizing nation-state'. This might also be why pearling heritage is mobilized in a way that makes it the citizen's heritage and not the migrants', a secure nationalistic project rather than a transnational or multicultural nationalizing project that reflects the past and present Indian Ocean entanglements of Arab Gulf societies. This could create a barrier in using heritage practices to foster the broader environmental movements necessary to foster inclusive environmental reforms in the GCC, since excluding or marginalizing the Gulf's Indian Ocean entanglements precludes the Gulf's majority communities. The construction of national heritage and its corresponding citizenry plays a role in limiting environmental citizenship in practice, which is bound up with the structuring of society around the internal citizen-stranger relationship discussed earlier.

Contradictions of citizenship

Organizations referred to above in the GCC have too simplistically adopted a conception of liberal citizenship and civil society without considering the context of Arab Gulf states, their distinct state-society relations and the presence of large numbers of migrants in the mix, and in some places tourists too. This has contributed to making the application of environmental citizenship appear awkward in the context of the significant citizen-foreigner relationship in GCC countries and their specific historical developments, which include the remnants of rentier state policies that were encouraged by Western and international powers.

If expatriates constitute a permanent feature of temporary-labour in GCC nations, the hierarchy of citizen and foreigner and its role in shaping and structuring society needs to be examined to understand the possibilities of environmental reform. The above discussion has identified multiple sites in which the possibility of exercising environmental rights and responsibilities among the diverse communities in the Arab Gulf are curtailed. Citizens typically receive significant state subsidies and their engagement with state authorities is meagre, giving them little incentive to rethink and alter consumption or opportunity to seek debate and action. Government initiatives aim to reframe subsidies and persuade citizens to pay for environmentalism based on an assumption of individual duty, treating them primarily as ideal consumers of environmental goods and services. The sponsor status of citizens obligates duties to non-citizen migrants while being prone to their exploitation and places responsibilities toward the extensive migrant populations on individual citizens themselves, creating a diffusion or obfuscation of responsibility. As the kafala system limits the rights of the migrant majority in the GCC, a major area of social and ecological relations goes overlooked. It is a social system of transnational labor that contributes to reproducing the environmental contradictions of citizenship. Thinking in terms of environmental citizenship helps to reveal how these ideologies of transnationalism and extractivism run deeply through and enable the specific privileges and consumerism of national citizenship in the GCC. National identity and national heritage work to naturalize this relationship between citizens and foreigners, and tend to elide or occlude extractivism and the migrant labor regime, mobilizing instead pre-oil heritage subjects, tourist destinations and consumerism. There is also a lack of contextualizing the system of labor, petro-industries and culture of consumption within their specific climatic and environmental settings in the region.

I suggest that the GCC configuration of labor, belonging and national identity, which is partly enabled through kafala, will be at odds with a version of citizenship that conceives environmental rights and duties as attached not only to citizens defined narrowly by circumscribed lineage but also to other people with significant relations to the state or society, even if these connections are the patron-client relations made possible by kafala over generations. As Dito (2015) suggests, redefining citizenship in GCC nations in order to overcome some of the adverse economic and social effects of kafala that have developed would imply a change to the financial privileges and patron status with which citizens are endowed, but bringing with it other benefits and challenges. We can add to this that steering citizenship (whether by drawing on Islamic traditions, private women's movements or other movements that produce social change) in a direction less impeding to a practical environmental ethics in relation to large groups of people (non-citizens) in the GCC would also carry the same implications.

As GCC states apply a framework of environmental citizenship that is strictly national, or transnational (even in its simple inter-territorial sense), they will likely fail to see that efforts or movements that can overcome barriers to action on environmental issues in the GCC might depend more on other, non-state relationships such as family ties in private domains, or cosmopolitan and labor relations within and beyond the stranger majority. More attention could be paid to the contradiction between, on the one hand, the deeply embedded history of Indian Ocean mobility and intermingling of people in the Arab Gulf and the hyper-dependence on migrants in GCC states today — both of which formed the past and present fabric of these societies — and on the other hand, an

invisibility and lack of political understanding of emigres, migrants and others in constructions of the nation and environment or in pathways to fostering a deeper understanding and awareness of the ecological dimension of the citizen-foreigner relationship. A combined religious and secular consideration would also be of benefit in understanding frameworks of environmental citizenship in the Arab Gulf littoral, an approach that could attend to religious organizations, tribal traditions, and more private domains of life and associations where norms and practices emerge and are fostered with environmental and political significance, as much as it considers government policies that are espoused with the aura of state authority and officialdom.

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Notes on contributor

Ian R. Simpson is Assistant Professor in the Department of Heritage and Society at Leiden University. His research examines issues of cultural heritage, environment and memory in society from anthropological perspectives, and investigates relationships between religion, environment, materiality and market exchange in early Islamic and medieval history.

ORCID

Ian R. Simpson http://orcid.org/0000-0003-4480-8434

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